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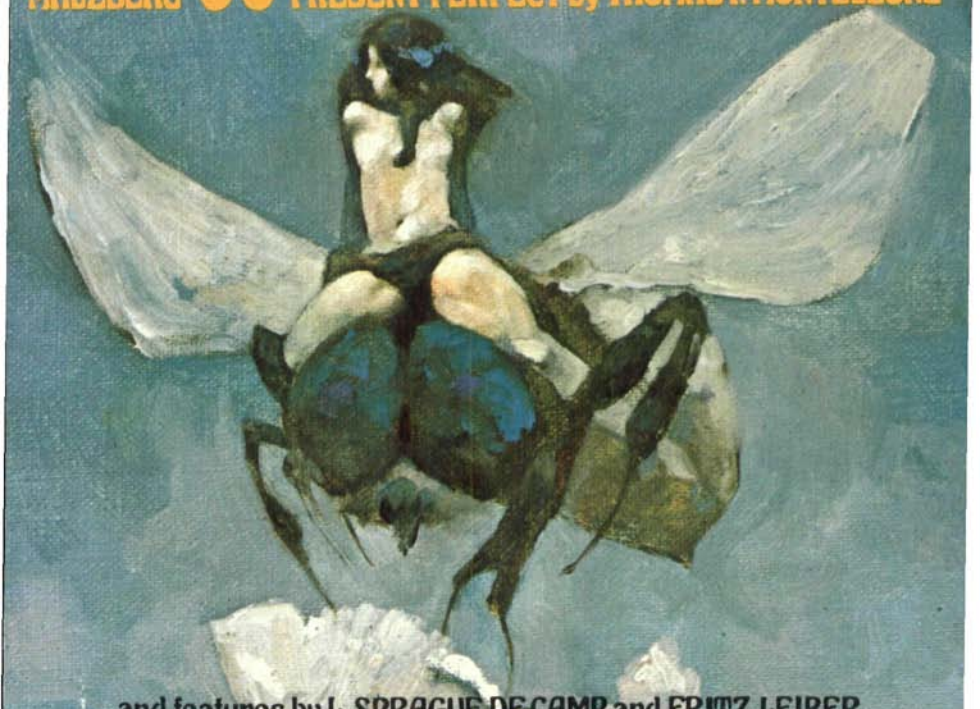
WILL-O-THE-WISP

Beginning A New Novel By THOMAS BURNETT SWANN

POETS AND HUMANS by GEO. ALEC EFFINGER ● TATTERED STARS, TARNISHED BARS by GORDON EKLUND ● ● HANGING by BARRY N. MALZBERG ● ● PRESENT PERFECT by THOMAS F. MONTELEONE



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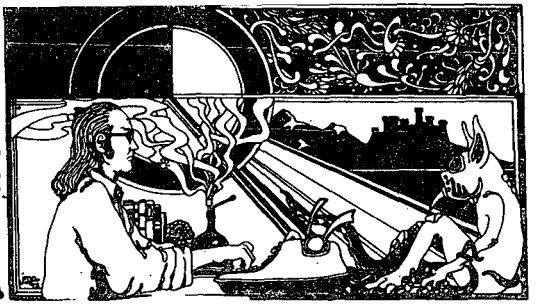

TED WHITE editorial

MORE THAN TEN YEARS AGO my first editorial position in the sf field was that of Assistant Editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, a position I more or less lucked into when a friend of mine complained to that magazine's editor, Avram Davidson, that his submission had come back to him from the magazine only one day after he'd mailed it.

As it happened, my friend and I both lived in Brooklyn. Avram, on the other hand, was then living in Milford, Pennsylvania. The editorial offices of *F&SF* were located in Manhattan, but manuscripts mailed to that address were forwarded—or so my friend thought—to Milford. He found it hard to believe that, even with the Post Office operating at top efficiency, a story he mailed on one day could have reached a Manhattan address, been forwarded to Milford, been read and rejected, and returned to him by return mail *the next day*. When we both drove up to Milford to visit Avram, not too long after that sequence of events had occurred, my friend made a point of asking Avram about it.

Avram had not seen the story, of course, and he told us that the magazine had for a short time employed a rather *too* efficient assistant editor, one who seemed to reject most of the stories he received without even reading them—and this explained the instant return of my friend's story. The fellow in question, Avram said, was no longer associated with the magazine. (Purely as a digression let it be noted that the events referred to occurred in early 1963. At that time it was possible to mail something to Manhattan from Brooklyn and get it back a day later. The Post Office and its successor, the Postal Service, no longer make any pretense at such speed or efficiency and it is, indeed, hard to remember that such service was ever available. Such is progress.)

Well, my ears perked up when Avram said that the magazine's assistant editor was no longer an assistant editor. Was it possible, I asked, that I might be qualified for the position? Avram pondered the point briefly and opined that it was. He suggested I call Ed Ferman on my return to New York City and apply for the job. I did, with Avram's recommendation, and found my name on *F&SF*'s masthead with the November, 1963 issue—an unusual issue in that it sported Hannes Bok's last cover painting (a beauty!) and Roger Zelazny's powerful "A Rose for Ecclesiastes."

My job, basically, was to read "the slush pile"—the unsolicited manuscripts from authors (or would-be authors) unknown to the editor.

I once calculated that I read an av-

(continued on page 116)

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I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM

It was the computer's revenge. In rage, in frenzy, he turned us into monstrosities, imprisoning us deep inside his endless banks. Now I am a great soft jelly thing.

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WILL-O-THE-WISP

THOMAS BURNETT SWAN

Thomas Burnett Swann's first stories appeared in the British magazine, Science-Fantasy, *more than ten years ago; in more recent times they have been published in* The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction *and, in book form, by Ace and DAW Books. There is a consistency to his vision, yet a diversity of plot, setting and characters. His stories are set in historical times, past times in which myth and magic have blended with recorded history, and Swann offers fresh insights into these myths and the way in which the reality of their magicks has molded those who people his stories—human and non-human alike. Here he is at the top of his form, writing about post-Elizabethan England—but one in which the original, non-human, inhabitants remain in cloistered pockets, living among humans when they can but living also with the danger of being burned as witches. It is, he says, "a novel suggested by the life of Robert Herrick—poet, vicar, and pagan." It is a treat to read.*

(Part One)

Book One: Nicholas

Chapter I

"OUR NEW VICAR, Robert Herrick, to say nothing of staring shamelessly at the ankles of the comeliest maidens in his congregation, to say nothing of having included a poem by Catullus in his last sermon *before* the Twenty-Sixth Psalm, is perhaps, nay, probably, guilty of a crime for which the only suitable punishment is burning at the stake. *He is said on good authority to consort with the infamous Gubbings of Dartmoor.*"

Nicholas crumpled the heavy parchment of his father's letter and hurled it to the floor. It struck soundlessly on the rush carpet; he had somehow expected a thud. He collapsed into a chair ideally unsuited to the human frame (triangular seat, hard oaken back; his only chair, and rented at that) and stared through the gable window over the tennis court, the bathing pool, the orchard of Emmanuel College, that swelling fountain—some said nest—of Puritanism at Cambridge University.

Mercifully, he heard George climbing the wooden stairs of the building which was at once a library, a lecture hall, and a dormitory: George, who shared his rooms, who was not a Puritan,

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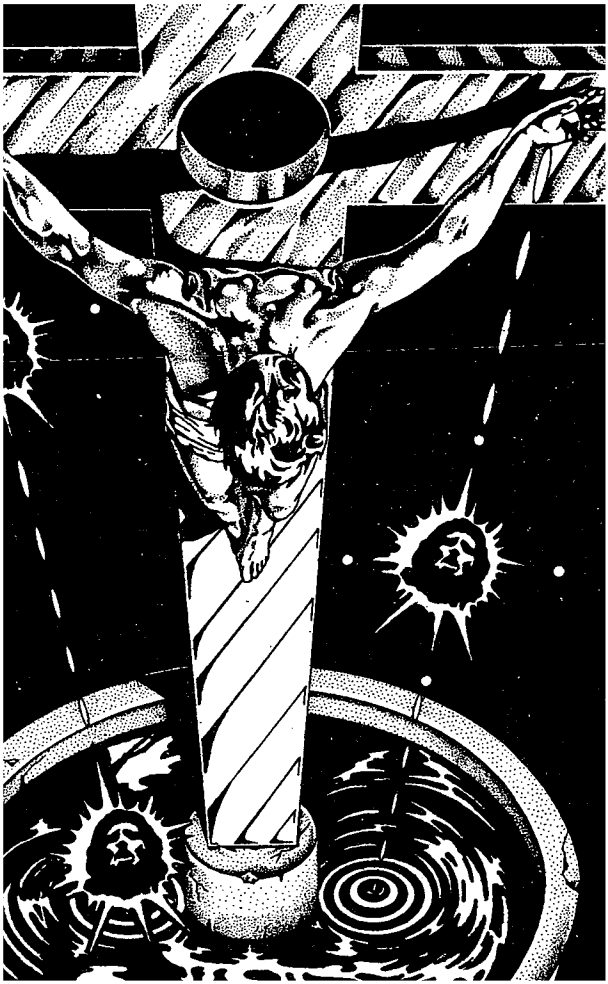

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whose hair fell in golden ringlets around his shoulders. In spite of his dress, George was neither a fop nor a dandy; he was a robust young gentleman from Sussex who dressed with the elegance of his class when they attended college or went to London.

"George," Nicholas cried. "I want to do something—rather bad."

George removed his cape and kicked a volume of Vergil under the bed. A slow smile ruddied his features ("ale-dyed features," Nicholas' father insisted).

"You mean you want to let your hair grow long or wear a ring on your finger?" On his own fingers, rings glittered like bumblebees on stalks of rhubarb. He also wore earrings of hammered gold.

"Oh, much worse," Nicholas cried. "I—I've been having those dreams again. The maidens dancing around a Maypole, and —and—"

"I know, you've already told me six or seven times. One of them showing her bosom."

"Both bosoms." To no one else would he have confessed his carnal dreams. It was rare for the son of an apothecary to share rooms with the son of a country squire, but the crowded conditions at the college had compelled the arrangements and Nicholas had never ceased to bless the crowds. He liked George with the half-shocked, half-adoring affection of a pious, mannerly boy for a good-natured rogue.

"The word 'bosom,'" said George, whose knowledge of anatomy was as extensive as his knowledge of Latin was limited, "may apply to a woman's entire breast, or to either globe. My application was to the entirety."

"George, I'm serious."

"Puritans always are. However, in this instance, so am I. There is nothing more serious, more sublime than a woman's bosom—or bosoms—as Catullus observed in his poem about Lesbia's sparrow and its favorite nesting place."

Nicholas stifled a sob. As a rule, Puritans only wept when they fell from grace.

"Little friend, tell me what's the matter."

Nicholas retrieved and smoothed the discarded parchment and read the damning words.

Even George did not jest about such matters. Not when men and women were being hanged and burned throughout the whole of England, as well as on the Continent, for conjuring the Devil or the Hag or their legions of demonic followers. When God had come to England with the Romans, the pagan gods had scuttled from field and fen, and the Devil, who gave them asylum in Hell, appeared to be permanently routed and tidily exiled. Now, however, as Anglicans, Papists, and Puritans wrangled over creeds and deeds and threatened civil war, he had clearly regrouped his forces and erupted

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from Hell.

"Consorts with Gubbings. . . . Not a light charge, is it?" He drooped sympathetically in his chair, which was square of bottom and cushioned with velvet (he *owned* his chair).

Indeed, it was a deadly charge. The Gubbings of Devonshire and its harshest region, Dartmoor, were not the little folk of Master Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the first place, they were witches and warlocks; in the second place, they were more than men and women who worshipped Satan and shared in his superhuman powers. They themselves were thought to be more than human. No one had seen them face to face, and they were variously described as hideous like Caliban (in order to horrify) or beautiful like Ariel (in order to ensnare), but everyone agreed that there was something bestial about them. Tails? Talons? Wings? Shadowy figures crossed the moors at night, but nobody knew if they crawled, fluttered, or flew. Only that they were evil —and powerful.

"Grim Devon," George continued, echoing a popular phrase. "Your county is well named. That time I visited you in Dean Church, I felt as if I were lost in Vergil's Hell. Soggy moors all over the place, roads too rough for carriages. And the light we saw the night of the wake— Your father called it a Will-o-the-Wisp. 'Sent by the Gubbings.' Remember how it tried to lure us?"

"Into a bog, no doubt. And did you know that my great-uncle was stolen from his bed when he was a wee child and a horrid creature with feathers on his back was left in his place?"

"A changeling! You never told me you had one in the family."

"My father doesn't like me to speak of him. The changeling was drowned in a stream, but no one ever found my great-uncle."

"But what has your vicar consorting with Gubbings to do with wanting to be bad?"

Nicholas lowered his head. "I liked him. He's new, you know, and I only heard him preach once, at Christmas, but he invited me to the Vicarage with some of the other boys and girls, and I was the last to leave. We drank ale—oh, just a cup or two—even Father drinks on holidays—and he asked me to call him Robin. He's quite old—thirty-nine, I think—but he seemed, well, *young*. No beard, no wrinkles, hair like a sheaf of yellow wheat. And he writes poetry."

"In other words, if a vicar you like—"

"Liked. I can't keep on liking a man who consorts with Gubbings, can I?" He really meant: I ought not to keep on liking such a man.

"Liked. If he can commit a big sin, then you think you may be allowed a little sin and God will be too busy to take any notice. That is, if you do it before you're ordained."

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"Exactly."

"That's Puritan logic for you. Even when you sin, you have to have a reason for it. But do you know what I think, Nicholas? I think you've only told me one reason. You more than liked this Robin Herrick, you idolized him." (An unfortunate choice of verbs. Pagan idols, golden calves, and all that. Accurate, though.) "He probably reminded you of Catullus. Then he let you down. You're hurt, angry, disappointed. You want to forget that letter. You—"

"Will you help me to commit a little sin?"

George specialized in rhetoric. He hoped one day to become the Public Orator of Cambridge. When he began to talk, he did not like to be interrupted, but when his observations were uncannily correct, it was best to interrupt him. Yes, Nicholas had worshipped Robin Herrick. There was a goldenness about the man. You expected to find him out-of-doors and not in church. Blessing the sheaves of the harvest, not the wine of communion.

"How little? You realize that my experience is vast. I may be the third son of a country squire, but I've travelled to the Continent. I've spent a whole year in London. Was it a wench you had in mind?"

"Oh, no!" Nicholas cried, thrusting—or trying to thrust—the bosom of that disquieting dream back into its bodice. "Not that bad. I simply thought that you might take me to the Devil Tavern. The name, don't you know. And all that tobacco smoke in the air. And blackamoors looking as if they had been scorched in the fires of Hell. And a mug or two—or three—of ale."

"Why not a hogshead? Or perhaps some French brandy. In short, you want to get drunk."

"Let's just say I want to roister a bit."

"God's nails," George laughed. "Is that all you want? I roister six nights a week! Tonight you shall be my sole companion. Male, that is. I'll teach you the fine art of roistering."

"But no wenches. I'm a slow learner."

"Who else do you think will serve your ale? Call them barmaids if you like."

"Barmaids are acceptable. I meant I only want to be served."

"Good service," George continued ruthlessly, "includes more than setting a mug of ale on the table. Stand up, Nicholas."

Nicholas stood to his full height of five feet and under. George's scrutiny he began to feel like a calf being offered for sale at a Devon fair.

"You have the wrong color hair for a Puritan. Even when you crop it, it's red as the Devil's backside."

Nicholas blushed. "My mother says its woodpecker-red. Most of the Puritans in Dean Church have hair that color."

"Same thing. As for your body,

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I've never seen you naked. You always bathe behind a screen." So far as Nicholas knew, no one had seen him naked since he was a small child, and he had never seen his father so much as stripped to the waist. To a Puritan, an unclothed body was synonomous with temptation.

"But from what I can judge through that surplice, you'll do. A bit skinny. A bit short. Slight, one might say. But there's no accounting for female taste. Some of the girls prefer a little fellow." George himself, though not yet twenty, was tall and inclined to the stout. "And there's something in your favor. It's that confounded innocence. Those big green eyes that get round as a copper whenever I say 'God's nails.' Some girls like that. Just as some men like the blush of a virgin. It presents a challenge. It's fun, you know, to lead a sheep from the fold."

"But not among wolves, I hope. When I said I wanted to roister, I did *not* include wenching."

"You did not *say* wenching. But don't forget, I can read that Puritan mind of yours like Caesar's Latin." It was almost the only Latin which George could read. "Now the question is, when a wench sits in your lap and starts to run a hand through what's left of your curls after your father sheared your head, will you know what to do?"

"I've read Catullus."

"All of Catullus?"

"Yes." His voice fell to a confessional whisper. His tutor had expressly forbidden him to read certain scarlet pieces about the poet and his relationship with the notorious Lesbia, whom Nicholas called "that misguided lady," but who was better known in university circles as the Whore of Rome.

"Still, that's not the same thing as experience. The first time you notch an arrow you're not likely to hit the target. Unless," he added, "you can find a very easy target."

"Sometimes you sound like a sailor!" Nicholas cried, half in anger, half in admiration. He had never met a sailor, but the cloisters of Cambridge were no longer cloistered and ever since the time of Henry VIII, British seamen had been renowned for their bawdry.

"I wish I had been a sailor forty-two years ago," sighed George. "And sailed against the Armada. I'd trade twenty pious Charleses for one lusty Elizabeth. Now what do we have? On one side, Bishop Laud with his rituals. On the other, you Puritans with your confounded consciences. Oh well, there's still London and Fleet Street and the Devil Tavern, even if Ben Jonson is flat on his back and Shakespeare in his grave. Come on now. It's almost roistering time." He opened a chest and extracted a moss-green velvet cape, and a round hat with a large green feather, and a saffron shirt which could be

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laced to breeches which in turn were laced around the knees. A scent of camphor and storax pervaded the room. Nicholas recognized the clothes which George usually reserved for his visits to London. "Now get out of that surplice. There's hot water on the way. You can have the tub first."

"To think," cried Nicholas, "I'm going roistering with my best friend!"

He had quite forgotten the letter about his vicar. "*It is said on good authority that he consorts with the infamous Gubbings of Dartmoor.*"

"YOU PURITANS," chided George. "You're sitting as if your chair were a pew. Even when you sin, you have to work at it. Didn't the musicians do anything for you?"

"No." Such bands had been called a "noise" in the days of Elizabeth, and the name, Nicolas thought, well described them.

At great cost but without even pausing to count his shillings, generous George had engaged one of the private chambers in the Devil Tavern of Cambridge, a small but rakish counterpart to Ben Jonson's famous haunt in London. There were eight such chambers, each of them opening into the large central hall, and each of them named for a Biblical demon. George and Nicholas occupied the Beelzebub. There was a pile carpet on the floor, strewn with rushes to catch the fragments of food which fell from the table; there was a little fireplace with andirons in the shape of grinning metal dogs; and the walls were hung with scarlet damask which flickered in the firelight like the flames of Hell.

Nicholas lifted his mug and took a large gulp, which burned its way down his throat and sat torridly in his stomach. French brandy indeed! No wonder England was often at war with France.

Soon, however, he began to feel as if he were warming himself by a fire on a cold night. Perhaps it was the quantity of ale. Perhaps it was his gratitude to George, who wanted so much to please him. Perhaps it was the fact that sinning was a cultivated taste, like tobacco from the Colonies. At first it stung; then it pleased; then it delighted. The image of his father, stern in a black robe and broad-rimmed hat, came into his mind to shake an admonishing finger, but the genial George, forever refilling his mug, effaced the parental spectre.

"I really don't know—" he began, and he noted with pride that his speech was not in the least slurred—in fact, ale seemed to lend him eloquence. "I really don't know why all this"—and he gestured to include the chamber and indeed the entire tavern, "I really don't know why all this is forbidden to us Puritans. I find it quite Roman." He pointed to the roast suckling pig, half reduced to bones, which lay in a silver plat-

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ter on the trestle table. "Might not Julius Caesar have dined on such a meal? Or Cicero? And aren't the ancients held up to us as models of behaviour?"

"You know what they say about Puritans," said George. "In the early days they were Satyrs. God was angry because they had such a good time. He took away their horns, he took away their tails ('too much like the Devil'), he gave them feet instead of hooves. And finally he said, 'This is your punishment. From now on you're going to have to behave like monks.' But once in a while a Puritan reverts, and having a good time comes as naturally to him as swearing to a sailor. Do you know what you remind me of, Nicholas? Not so much a Satyr as one of those shepherds who danced with the Satyrs. There's not a wicked bone in your body, but there are several mischievous ones. You wouldn't organize an orgy, but you'd like to be invited. A hundred sermons can't quite smother the pagan in you—not while I'm here to play the pipes of Pan."

"Would you say that I'm a real roisterer now?" asked Nicholas, swinging his mug—pottery rimmed with pewter and molded into the shape of a gargoyle—so freely that he sloshed a few drops onto George's lace cuff.

"Not quite," said George good-naturedly, wiping his cuff with a flowered silk handkerchief from Canterbury. He clapped his hands and, like Pan conjuring a Dryad out of a tree, summoned a barmaid. No, she was not a barmaid. She was not the shapely but harassed and worn young woman who had served their dinner of pig, brawn, charfish, venison in pastry, sparrow grass, and strawberry pudding. Nicholas recognized her as a street wench or, as George would have said, a "dirty Dolly."

"Dessert," said George.

"I was quite happy with the pudding," mumbled Nicholas, stupefied by this wicked apparition. The black dishevelment of curls, the golden loops in her ears, the excessive rouge on her cheeks, and the huge red mouth which looked as if it could swallow a young Puritan without even undressing him. Fortunately, for the moment she was occupied with cracking a hazel nut between her teeth.

"Chloe, this is my friend Nicholas. He's inexperienced but willing. Experience him, if you will." George's departure was instantaneous. No goodbye. No parting advice. Neither barmaids nor blackamoors to shatter the silence, as tangible as tobacco smoke in the air. Behind a closed door which had suddenly come to resemble a portcullis, he shared the room with a half-eaten suckling pig and a painted giantess by the name of Chloe. If he rose to his feet, her bosom would be almost level with his eyes.

"Take a seat," said Nicholas.

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There. He could still make conversation. He was still fortified with ale.

Chloe took a seat in Nicholas' lap. Good manners—or sheer lack of strength—prevented his ejecting her onto the floor, though he felt that she had taken an unwarrantable liberty. Women's laps were for sewing, men's for holding Bibles. Covertly he surveyed her bosom. To call it sizable was to do her an injustice. It was like calling the many-freighted Thames a rivulet. He tried to recall some suitable phrases from the Song of Songs. But Chloe did not resemble a Rose of Sharon. She was more like a scarlet poppy, full-blown, somewhat ravaged by wasps and bees, but still nectareous.

"Have some pig," he continued.

"I've et."

Nicholas felt at a loss for words; more serious, he felt at a loss for actions. A good host should entertain his guest. But clearly she was inclined neither to conversation nor to cuisine. How would they pass the time? Being a Puritan, he could not play the flute, only the harp, and somehow harping—even could he find such an instrument in the inn—did not seem to suit the occasion.

"Do you play the flute?" he asked.

For answer, she coiled her hand around his neck and lodged her fingers under his collar. He began to feel warm. Images pranced before his mind, the familiar maidens dancing around the Maypole, but all of them now had the face of Chloe, and they revealed much more than just their breasts. He had never seen a live naked woman, but once he had visited George in his father's manor house and found a garden of stone nymphs, however, but even the nymphs of his imagination had not prepared him for the nude amplitudes, both seen and surmised, of Chloe.

"God's balls," she swore. "With you shy 'uns, it's like picking the oyster out o' its shell."

He sat quite frozen; no, baked was the word. He felt as if he had moved uncomfortably close to a blazing Yule log.

"Well, 'e *said* you'd need some coaxing. Best get the boots off first." She knelt and, careful to avoid the spurs, removed the boots with forceful fingers. Then she proceeded to remove his doublet hose and rose-emboidered garters. He thought with a modicum of relief, It will take her several minutes on my collar and cuffs, and happily my shirt is laced to my breeches. (He was glad that he was not wearing a cod piece). All the time he felt as if he were getting closer and closer to the Yule log. Soon he would start to feel like a laurel branch which someone had thrown in the fire to scent the room.

But Chloe was impatient. "What are you, a Johnny-Go-to-

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Plough? Be a gentleman and *help.*" She attacked the restraining lace as if she were a fishwife disentangling a succulent charfish from her husband's net. The lace was not meant to withstand the assault of thick, calloused fingers and Nicholas decided that departure, not hospitality, was the best course of action. He lurched to his feet, seized his coat, and, supporting his breeches with his free hand, stumbled out of the room and into the main hall.

"Score a pint of bastard," one of the waiters was calling to the one-eyed man at the central bar, but waiter and one-eyed man and indeed the entire company of students and townspeople and visiting rustics, paused, so it seemed to Nicholas, to watch his flight, and he felt, even if he did not turn to see, an outraged Chloe watching him from the door of the Beelzebub. He skidded against a sideboard, dislodged a waterfall of pewter vessels, and staggered into the street with laughter cackling behind him.

George was idling under the sign across the street, a wooden antlered head emblazoned with the words "Stag Inn"—the Cambridge boys called it "Stagger Inn"—and evidently deciding if he should wait for his friend or resume his revels.

"George!" Nicholas shouted, stepping, no, leaping onto the cobblestones of the street. He meant to accost his friend, thank him for the roistering, reprove him for the wench, and announce his intention to return at once to the college and burn his volume of Catullus. He was so confused, however, that he fell to his knees. The air was dank with mist from the fens to the West of Cambridge and, far from clearing his brain, further befuddled him.

He saw but could not avoid the hackney coach as it clattered down the street, its black leather-covered body swaying like a huge mill spider. The driver attempted to rein his horses; quickly, much too quickly. The horse on the left reared into the air and beat Nicholas to the stones with his hooves. The carriage wheels did not run over him, and fortunately Nicholas was able to shield his head with his arms. But he felt as if his leg had been struck by a headsman's axe, and he heard the snap of a bone, a quick, brittle crunch like the snapping of a turkey wing in the hands of a hungry squire.

Before he lost consciousness, he thought: God is remarkably fast in punishing those who have strayed, even by one little meadow, from the fold.

God—or the Gubbings?

Chapter II

THE VILLAGE appeared to be empty except for a sheep dog strayed from the fields, looking about him for sheep, and an old man who leaned on his crutches

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and nodded in the sun. The vine-covered stone cottages, some of them wall to wall, some of them standing separate like green hay ricks, lay quiet and muffled and forsaken by their masters, who had gone to the Harvest Home.

There were no customers in the shop of Michael Standish, Apothecary, the richest commoner in the town and the only father who could afford to send his son to Cambridge. Glass bottles, pottery jars, pewter bowls twinkled on the shelves. Opium, camphor, and storax. Rhubarb, cloves, and cinnamon. Tomorrow there would scarcely be a moment when Master Standish was not dispensing powder for a customer behind his counter, while his wife, as unobtrusive as a handloom in her skintight cap, her robe of black homespun, dusted shelves or emptied vials.

But today was the Harvest Home. Today he sat with his wife and son on the bench at the rear of the shop, beside the work table, beneath the shelves.

"I used a year's profit from the shop to send you to Cambridge. Did you know I had to pay double fees because you're a commoner?" Nicholas ought to know; his father reminded him whenever they met. "And you have to go carousing with that rakish friend of yours, George Dunwich. Didn't I expressly warn you against him? However, Christ tells us that the Prodigal returned and was forgiven, and I am disposed to forgive you. The nature of your penance is self-evident." He looked at Nicholas' crutches, his swollen leg—broken, badly set, still painful. "Nevertheless—"

He paused for emphasis and assumed his Moses look. Small like his wife and son, he somehow gave the appearance of bulk and majesty. Though he lacked a beard, he might have been hewn from the ragged tors of Dartmoor. He had a way of standing with one hand slightly raised, as if he intended to hurl a thunderbolt or, in his benign moods, bestow a benediction. He had never struck his son, but neither had he embraced him. In spite of his red hair, he seemed to move in twilight and gather its shadows into the room.

"Nevertheless, though your leg prevents you from returning to Cambridge, though it appears that you are unsuited to holy orders and I must apprentice you to me as an apothecary, there is still God's work to be done. As you know, there is a devil among us right here in Dean Church."

"Master Herrick?" Nicholas ventured when his father stared at him like a headmaster awaiting the conjugation of a Latin verb.

"Who else? I wrote you about our suspicions. Only yesterday he remarked to the Miller's wife, 'One of these days I'm going to visit the Gubbings. Since they won't bring their children to church to be baptized, I'll have to

(continued on page 75)

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GORDON EKLUND

TATTERED STARS, TATTERED BARS

Gordon Ekund's last appearance here was a year ago ("The Stuff of Time," September, 1973); he returns with a mood story about realities–alternate; subjective; rooted in memories and the past–and about their conflict and resolution in the person of a man already subtly out of time and place. . .

Illustrated by JOE STATON

PAUSING FOR A MOMENT, Andy raised a hand and wiped the thick deposits of August sweat from his lips and chin and brow, then took a deep breath and continued up the rickety wooden steps that led to the front door of Miss Raymond's house. Was it really the heat that made living so unbearable down here, or was it the humidity? Andy had spent the past two summers in Texas and Colorado, where it often got very hot, but he had never suffered anything like this. Maybe the humidity could be taken and used as a blame for all the rest. Maybe it was enough to explain why the people down here were the way they were. But, no—it couldn't be just that only. He had a plain feeling they couldn't be any different in the winter than the summer, or the spring or fall—all the same. Mississippi was a consistent force—invariably lethargic.

Reaching the front door, he tapped softly. Immediately, the flowered curtain drawn across the front window fluttered as though shaken by a sudden draft. Andy smiled: that was Edna. While he waited for the door to be opened, he pulled out a linen handkerchief and wiped his face again. He looked down at the white cloth. Now if only that would wipe off, too. He peered across the porch to the much bigger house that occupied the adjoining yard. If he could've done that, wouldn't they be happy? Or would they? Was that really what they wanted from him? A face as clean and bright and sparkling as this white handkerchief?

The door opened suddenly and there stood Edna. "What are you so grim about?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," Andy said, stuffing the handkerchief away. Dipping his head a half-dozen inches,

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he slipped through the narrow doorway. "Just a passing thought."

"They been irritating you again?" Edna said, gesturing back with her big head, indicating the big house next door.

"I haven't seen them."

Circling, Edna appeared in front of him. "She's been expecting you since before ten."

"The bus was late." Andy liked Edna very much. She was at least forty, perhaps fifty—who knows?—even sixty and wide, round, black. She reminded him—physically—of a character actor in a twenty-year-old movie taking the part of a Southern slave mammy. But only physically. Edna was a servant—but not servile.

"I will show you in," she said.

It was cool in the small house. The dollhouse, he sometimes called it—Miss Raymond's dollhouse. The biggest room opened directly off the front door, but Miss Raymond preferred to receive him farther in the back. In the parlor. The sitting room.

He smiled at those strangely proper words. Where he came from, a sitting room was a place without any furniture so you had to sit on the floor.

"None of them around at all?" Edna asked, as she led him down a hallway.

"I told you no."

"Just wondering," she explained.

"And there you are," said Miss

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Raymond, as Andy followed Edna into the sitting room. "I was beginning to think you had chosen to go fishing."

"Too hot for that," Andy said.

"Indeed it is. Edna—Edna, you bring us tea. Andy—you must know where to sit."

Andy occupied the chair across from Miss Raymond. She smiled at him and rocked silently. Her hands—as always—were demurely folded in her slender lap. He did not think she read—not books at least—and was certain she did not knit or crochet or do anything like that. She just sat here, rocking.

He didn't know her first name. To him, she was always Miss Raymond. Nor did he know exactly how old she was. He gathered she had been born in this very town around the year 1880, which if true would place her just past eighty. Her hair was colored auburn—with neither a wisp of gray nor white—and very bright. Her face beneath was small, slender, fragile, pale, delicately lined by age. Her lips were narrow, her chin a sharp point, and her hands—down in her lap—as tiny and white as miniature carnations.

The room itself—the air circulated gently and freely—smelled of fresh mint.

"What have you been thinking about?" Andy asked Miss Raymond, as he always did.

"Oh, about him." She rocked in her chair. "About Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Abraham Lincoln."

"I know of him," Andy said.

"And of those tragic events that occurred immediately following the end of the war."

"Yes, Miss Raymond."

"Here in the South many people felt satisfied. They blamed Lincoln for the war itself. One of these was my father's younger brother John, who had lost the whole of his right arm at the Battle of Stanley's Bridge. To hear him tell of it, Mr. Lincoln was Satan himself, only with a longer beard. But Father—my father—often said that Lincoln was a larger man than the other Yankees. A man of honesty and self-respect, he said, and those two qualities were the ones which formed the real foundation for any measure of man's true worth."

Edna entered the room on soft feet, waiting until Miss Raymond was done, then drawing up a round table and setting the tea tray upon it. She poured two cups and placed one in front of Miss Raymond where it could be reached.

Then she turned and left the room.

Miss Raymond asked, "So tell me, Andy, what do they say about Mr. Lincoln up there at that college of yours? At—"

"Columbia University," he said.

"Yes, there. What do they say of him?"

"For the most part they agree with your father. A good, honest man who—"

"And the war?" She wagged a

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finger, laughing sharply—almost a giggle. "How do your people explain that?"

"By laying the blame where it belongs. Upon the generals. Meade, Burnside, McClellan."

"Oh, how I recollect those days," Miss Raymond said. "How well I knew those enemy names. I know no man among us expected to lose the war, and yet how many of us would have asserted that victory would be ours? My father, an educated man, a lawyer, could see which resources the North possessed and we did not. But then—of a sudden—as rapid as lightning from the sky—" she laughed again "—there came General Robert E. Lee marching through the woods of Pennsylvania—New York lying unprotected ahead of him, Philadelphia, Boston. And then the unforgettable day itself—August 24, 1863—exactly one hundred years ago next week. No wonder with that date looming so vast in my mind that I cannot help recalling the celebration that raged along this river from Memphis to Vicksburg and beyond. The boats. Steamers running night and day. Men dashing from town to town, celebration to celebration. We had won the war and beside that if the Lord had chosen to send down a second son few would have noticed. Men of all types and sizes and classifications came and went. My father, too. And the Yankee troops, in siege around Vicksburg, their heads now bowed in grief. They came forward to our boys and stuck out their hands and said how it ought to be forgiven. My father said, yes, forgiven, but he also said he would never forget a minute of that glorious night so long as he continued to live in this mortal world."

She paused for a moment, eyes distantly focused, a slight and gentle smile upon her lips. Andy knew that she wasn't here. She was in another place, faraway through space and time, a place where it was now—and perhaps always—August 24, 1863.

A sudden motion from behind made Andy turn around. There was nothing there and he turned back to Miss Raymond but just then another flicker of motion made him turn again. Still, there was nothing.

Miss Raymond was speaking again: "But what amazes and gratifies me most of everything is the truly high regard felt in the North for General Robert E. Lee. Father said Northerners are better at losing than Southerners, while we are the ones who are best at winning. In that case, he always said, the war worked out to a most satisfactory conclusion for all concerned."

"Lee freed the slaves," Andy said, wondering again if she really understood who and what he was, that these slaves of whom she spoke were in reality his blood ancestors. She had never seemed to notice, not that first night

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when she, a white Southern woman, had ordered Edna to stop the car and invite him, a black Northern man, to ride into town. She had then—in the course of the drive—still not noticing—asked him to her home for tea the following Saturday. He had come. They had talked. And when, hours later, she had asked him to return the next Saturday, he had not hesitated to say yes.

"He was a great and honorable man," was all Miss Raymond would say, meaning Robert E. Lee.

When they were finished at last—the teapot drained—Andy stood and went out. Edna followed him out onto the front porch. It was even hotter now than before.

"She likes you," Edna said. "I believe you're the first new person she's had in twenty years or more. I've heard her stories so many times I think she understands it's not easy for me to act interested."

"You've heard them?"

"Oh, yes. Of course."

"But have you ever. . .?" He had been going to ask if she had ever seen the shapes, those vague flickers of motion, those insubstantial and uncertain forms.

"Have I ever what?"

"Oh, nothing. I'll see you next Saturday."

"We'll look for you, Andy."

But Edna remained on the porch while Andy wound his way down the rickety steps. At the bottom, in spite of himself, he turned and looked at the big house next door and there, gazing straight at him from the wide front window, he saw a pale, shrunken, puckered female face. He looked away at once, shrugged, then went on down the street. The bus stop was a mile away—in the center of town.

He was First Lieutenant Andrew J. Brown, United States Air Force. He taught classes of enlisted men at the small Air Training Command base five miles outside the city limits of Grangerpool, Mississippi.

The school commander, Major Riley, a tired man with a slender moustache, had spoken to Andy only three weeks after his visits to Miss Raymond had begun. This was back in the middle of June.

"Personally, Lieutenant, it means nothing to me," said Major Riley, "but I cannot ignore a letter such as this. It's my duty to protect the men of my command whenever possible."

"And it is my right," Andy said, "to visit whomever I please wherever I please."

"But is it wise? This woman—"

"She is eighty years old."

"But that doesn't seem to mean anything to these people."

"I don't care what it means to them. I'm going to keep seeing her until she asks me to stop. Sir."

"Well, all right, all right. I suppose I can't. . ."

Even then—even that soon

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—Andy didn't think he could have stopped even if he had wanted. It was not Miss Raymond, it was he, Andrew Brown, who needed those talks, who was not sure that he could even bear to survive if deprived of them. Even when—in July—he first began to sense the presence of the shapes, realized that he and Miss Raymond were not alone in the sitting room, he did not pause to reconsider.

Two weeks after his talk with Major Riley, the men met him at the foot of the rickety stairs. He had seen one of them before—in the front window next door—looming beside the puckered woman.

"Hold on there," said one of them. There were four. "Where do you think you're going?"

"Home," Andy said, trying to push past them.

Another man reached out, grabbed Andy's sleeve, and stopped him. "First we want to know what you were doing back there."

"If you really have to know," Andy said, "I was drinking tea."

"With who?" the man demanded.

"With Miss Raymond," Andy said.

"As her guest," said the voice.

All of them turned at once to see Edna standing upon the lowest stair, a yellow broom clutched in her right hand like a knight's avenging sword.

The one man let Andy go.

The other men stepped hastily away.

With a nod to Edna, Andy walked on, refusing to look back.

He never met the men face-to-face again. But he saw them—constantly—in the big front window.

And he saw Miss Raymond, too. Saturday after Saturday. The rest of August. Through September and October. Into November.

He usually ate lunch alone in a small fragrant snack bar at the edge of the base. One Friday he was alone in the bar except for the presence of four enlisted men seated around a single table. They were playing a radio—loudly—not music, but a shrill, undecipherable announcer.

Andy went over to ask them to lower the volume.

"I'm sorry but would you mind—?"

"Somebody—"

"Just turn it down a little—"

"They shot—"

"Not off, just down—"

"—killed—"

"What—?"

"Killed him—"

"Killed who?"

"The President. They—"

"Oh, no," Andy said. "Oh, no, no, no."

"In Texas."

"No!"

When Andy returned to his classroom, he was shocked to discover that more than half the men were in tears. It shocked him too when he found out he was crying

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too.

The next day there was a parade. It had rained all afternoon Friday but stopped sometime during the night and the sun came limping back Saturday. Andy stood at attention at the front of his flight, hearing Major Riley recite the words of the new President, the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Air Force, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Chief of Staff for the Air Force, Commander of the Air Training Command—and he found out he was crying again.

"It is 1963," he told himself, whispering aloud. "1963, 1963, and not 1863, for that 1863 never was and never can be or could be or should. . ."

When the parade was dismissed, he returned to his quarters and spent the day there.

On Sunday he walked through the silent streets of Grangerpool on his way to Miss Raymond's house.

He reached the bottom of the stairs and glanced over at the house next door. The puckered face flowered hatefully at him. He smiled. "Your worries," he said, "are over."

Then he ascended.

Edna met him at the door. "Where were you yesterday? Miss Raymond was worried sick."

"I couldn't come."

"Do you want—I mean, today is—"

"If I may."

"Yes. Here. I'll take you there."

Miss Raymond sat in her chair in the sitting room. Her long dress was bright green and a ring of white ruffles circled the collar. Her hands were folded in her lap.

"Andy," she said. "You did come. I'm glad."

He glanced at the chair across from her, the place he normally sat, and waited for Edna to leave the room. Not a word was said by anyone about serving tea.

When they were alone, he asked Miss Raymond, "Do you know what happened Friday?"

"I know when you didn't come yesterday I was worried."

"Not yesterday—Friday."

She pursed her lips, plainly struggling to recollect. "Edna went grocery shopping Friday. I do remember now. But why do you want—?"

"But don't you even read the newspapers?" he cried.

"What? Why, yes—yes. Edna always fetches—"

He took a long step forward, standing high above her? "And what did yesterday's say?"

"The newspaper?"

"Yes—the headline. Tell me what it was."

"I can't very well. . ." Then, smiling suddenly, she nodded. "Andy, you are trying to tease me. I do recollect now. It was about the steamboats, about the big paddlewheelers and how—"

"No!" he cried. "Don't you understand? There aren't any steamboats. This is 1963."

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"I know that," she said coldly.

"But this is the real 1963. It isn't—" He broke off, having sensed—from the corner of an eye—the presence of something else in the room. He wheeled instantly but nothing was there. He rushed forward, crying out, "Go away! Get out of here! This isn't your world! You don't belong—!" He lunged ahead, seeing further shapes, spinning to confront them, nothing there.

"Andy—please." A hand, light as an angel's wing, pressed his shoulder. "Andy, sit down and tell me what's wrong."

She led him to his chair, then sat across from him, rocking gently. The shapes receded, were gone.

He could talk now.

So he told her what had happened Friday, a detailed account, fact piled upon fact, never daring to look at her for a moment. He saw her hands twisting in her lap, saw the chair go up, come down, up, down.

Finishing, he looked up at her.

"Andy," she said. "Andy, now you listen—listen to me."

"No!" he cried, knowing what she was going to say. He couldn't hear that—not any more. She was going to say he was wrong. It was not the United States but the Confederate States that had a President. The United States were ruled by an army officer named McKenzie, who kept himself surrounded by loyal bodyguards. Nobody could ever shoot him. As for the President of the Confederacy: why, everyone loved Mr. Gregory and she was sure he was not dead but alive in Richmond, for she had seen his picture in the morning paper which Edna had fetched and brought.

Andy said, "No, Miss Raymond, don't say it. It isn't right for you to—"

"What isn't right?" she asked.

"For you—for you to live in that other place. It's a dream world, a place that not only isn't real but never was real and never could be real. Why should you live there when the rest of us have to live in this place—in this damned world?"

"But do you have to?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, yes, yes!" He stood up, suddenly turning. They had come back: the shapes. Stronger than ever. No, no. He had to leave. Now. Not later. Now. Or he'd never get free.

Without a word, he hurried into the corridor. Edna called to him as he passed the big front room but he refused to respond. Out the door. Down the rickety stairs. Into the street.

He ran into a man. The same one who had grabbed him before.

"Didn't we warn you not—"

Andy hit him. The man was alone and he fell but Andy didn't look to see what happened next. He went home.

And didn't come back. Winter descended with abrupt, atypical suddenness, burying the land be-

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neath a freak snowstorm. Andy taught his assigned classes. He ate alone in the officers' club. On Friday nights, he drank in the club and, on Saturdays, always slept late—past eleven.

This was in December.

In January, Edna found him in the tavern. He rarely came to town but a friend had asked him and he agreed to an exception. But, shortly after arriving, the friend had gone away with a woman and now Andy drank alone.

He looked up and saw—in the doorway—Edna's determined shape.

She came straight over to his table.

"Andy, you'd better come with me," she said, ignoring the chair he'd drawn out for her.

"No," he said flatly.

"Andy, she's sick."

"I don't care—the answer is no."

"She's dying."

"I don't believe you." But he did.

"Miss Raymond is more than a hundred years old. What do you expect, Andy? The doctor says it's a miracle she's lived this long."

"More than a hundred?"

"Her birthday was a few months ago."

He stood up. "All right—let's go."

They walked together through town, Edna clutching his arm as if afraid he might try to flee. Dim streetlamps burned on every corner but there was nothing in between. Here and there stubborn traces of snow clung to the ground.

When they reached the dollhouse, Andy hesitated. Edna tugged at his sleeve: "Is something wrong? You're not—?"

"No," he said. "I'm coming—I will."

They went up. The house seemed dark and cold. The air was thick with dust and a heavy odor hung in every room.

Edna led Andy toward the rear of the house.

They passed through the sitting room and entered another. Here Miss Raymond lay in the center of a high bed. The curtains of the canopy had been drawn back to reveal her tiny, pale, carnation face—the flesh seemed whiter than the pillowcase beneath. The light was very dim back here. To see, Andy had to squint.

"He's here," Edna said. "Miss Raymond, Andy is here."

Then Edna turned and left the room.

Alone, Andy approached the bed.

Miss Raymond's eyes were closed but when Andy extended his hand toward hers she reached out and grasped it firmly.

"Andy," she said.

"Miss Raymond."

"Andy, I wanted to tell you." Her voice was barely a whisper. "You told the truth that day—you were right."

"No, Miss Raymond."

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"I can see it now. The real world. It's all around me, Andy, and I cannot escape it."

"Yes, you can, Miss Raymond."

"But, Andy—how? Tell me that—how?"

"By knowing the truth," he said.

"And what is that?" Her eyes opened suddenly, gazing straight into his.

"That this—all of this—is the real lie."

"It is?"

"It is, Miss Raymond."

She shut her eyes.

"The real world," he went on, "is the one where your father journeyed up and down the river from celebration to celebration. It is the one where the defeated came to the victorious with extended hands. It is the place where the end meant the beginning of life and not death and where forgetting meant also forgiving. That is the real truth, Miss Raymond—" he pressed down upon her hand "—and you must never forget it."

Then he stepped away from the bed.

It was changing now—already. Andy had done his part, played the role assigned to him. Now here came the rest. He sniffed the air, pure and sweet; he smelled fresh mint.

The shapes came out.

This time they did not pause at the edge of sight but came all the way out, assuming a firm substance, a clear reality. There were men and women both. The women were dressed in ankle-length gowns, wide petticoats, veiled hats, bright jewels, frills, laces, sharp perfumes. The men wore dark frock coats, bright vests, and each had a tiny white carnation in his buttonhole. They formed a circle around Miss Raymond's bed, taking her from his sight. Outside, he could hear the restive utterings of waiting horses.

It was late. He could not stay. It was time for him to go.

He went out, passing down the long corridor, through the front door.

Down the rickety stairs.

Below, he paused for a moment and looked at the big house next door. It was dark, boarded up, empty.

He turned down the muddy street, toward town, approaching faint golden lights that burned through the deep darkness. Already—hardly having gone a full block—he could hear, rising definitely ahead of him, the sound of booming, shouting singing voices rising sharply from down by the levee.

He went that way.

—GORDON EKLUND

ON SALE SOON
A BRAND NEW CONAN NOVELET,
SHADOW IN THE SKULL.

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For those who enjoy the tales of Conan, here is a story of Thongor of Lemuria–a character originally created by Lin Carter out of his love for Howard's Conan–in his youth. . .an "origin story" if you will. . .

BLACK HAWK OF VALKARTH

LIN CARTER

Illustrated by MICHAEL NALLY

CHAPTER 1.
Blood on the Snow

THE FLAMES OF SUNSET died to glowing coals in the crimson west. Slowly, the brooding skies darkened overhead, and the first few stars glared down upon a scene of terrible carnage.

It was a great valley in the land of Valkarth in the Northlands, beyond the mountains of Mommur, where the cold black waves of Zharanga Tethrabaal the Great North Ocean lashed a bleak and rock-strewn coast.

Although it was late spring, snow lay thick upon the valley. It was trampled and torn, and here and there bestrewn with motionless black shapes. These were the bodies of men and women and children, clad in furs and leathern harness, clasping broken weapons in stiff, dead hands. In their hundreds they lay sprawled and scattered amid the trampled snow, and against its dirty grey their blood was crimson.

The battle had begun at the birth of the day and with day's end it, too, had ended. All the long, weary day the warriors and hunters and chieftains of the Black Hawk nation had stood knee-deep in the snows and fought with iron blade and wooden club and stone axe against the enemies that had crept upon them in the night. One by one they had fallen, and now no single man lived or moved upon the gore-drenched snows of Valkarth. They had not died easily, but they had died; and very many of their foes lay beside them in the black sleep of death.

The valley was like a charnel-pit. And the stars looked down, wonderingly.

They had been a mighty people. The men were tall, strongthewed, with thick black manes and virile, golden eyes. The women were deep-breasted, their unshorn hair worn in heavy

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braids, their strong white bodies clad in belted furs against the bite of wintry winds. They had fought beside their men, the women of the Black Hawk clan, or back-to-back, and they too had heaped their dead before them. In the end they had gone down fighting; and their young, too, children scarce old enough to walk, had died with bloody knives clenched in their small fists.

Life in the bleak Northlands of lost Lemuria was one unending struggle against grim Nature, ferocious beasts, and no less savage men. The weaklings and the cowards die young: this nation had been strong, and it had died hard; but in the end it had died.

By one great rock a tall and stalwart warrior had taken his last stand. He had set his back against that rock and with his great sword he had hewn and hewn until the snowy slope before him was buried beneath the corpses of those who had come up against him. They had cut him down with arrows at the last, no longer daring to come within the reach of that terrible blade; at that, it had taken five arrows to kill him. He lay now with his broad shoulders still flat against the rock, his square-jawed face grim in death as in life, snow and blood bedabbled on his thick grey mane and beard. The wife of his youth lay beside him, a bear-spear still held in her cold hands, her head resting lightly against his shoulder. They had cut her down with an

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axe, and two of her tall sons and her young daughter lay near.

The name of the dead warrior had been Thumithar; he had been a chieftain of the clan, of direct descent in the male line from the hero Valkh—Valkh the Black Hawk, Valkh of Nemedis, the seventh of the sons of Thungarth of the first Kingdoms of Man. The war bards of the tribe, the old, fierce-eyed sagamen, told it had been Valkh who had founded the Black Hawk nation in time's grey dawn. And the great broadsword that lay still clasped in the dead fingers of Thumithar was none other than Sarkozan itself, the very Sword of Valkh.

He had been a wise chieftain, had Thumithar, just and strong. And a great war-leader, and a mighty hunter.

He would hunt no more, would Thumithar, with his tall sons at his side.

IN THAT GRIM panorama of death, one indeed yet lives. He was a scrawny boy, scarce fifteen, naked save for a ragged clout and a cloak of furs slung about bare shoulders. They were broad, those shoulders, but stooped with weariness now, and they bore a burden of sorrow, heavy for one so young to bear.

Blood was bright on the brown hide of his deep chest, and some of it was the blood of the foemen he had fought and slain, but much of it was his own. He limped through the bloody snow, dragging one foot behind him, and, now and again, he paused to look at this dead face and that one. He knew many of them, the dead faces; but he did not find the one he was looking for.

At last he came up to the place where the grey-maned warrior had taken his last stand, and the limping boy flinched at the sight of that dead face in the starlight. And the serene face of the woman that lay beside the dead man wrung a sharp cry from the white lips of the boy.

He crumpled into the snow before them on his knees and he hid his face in his hands. Tears leaked slowly through the blood-crusted fingers, and he wept there at last—he who had not wept before.

His name was Thongor.

CHAPTER 2.
The Cairn in the Valley

AFTER A TIME the boy climbed wearily to his feet and stood staring at the ruin of his world. In repose, he had the same grim-jawed face as his father, the same heavy, unshorn mane—save his was yet untouched with grey. His eyes glared golden like the eyes of lions, under scowling black brows. He had long, rangy legs, and strong arms seamed with scars, some of which were raw wounds.

In the crush and swirl of battle, he had been swept away from his

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father and his mother and his brothers. All day he had fought alone, with the tigerish fury of a young berserker, and many of the enemy had fallen before his murderous wrath. When his old sword broke in his hands, he had fought on with the stub, then with rocks clawed up from the snowy ground—finally, with his bare fingers and his strong white teeth.

He had taken a deep wound on the breast, and lesser wounds on thigh and shoulder and brow. He was splattered with blood from head to foot, although he had staunched the bleeding with snow until the wounds were numb.

The Snow Bear warriors had clubbed him down and beaten him to earth and left him for dead. That was their only mistake.

For he had not died.

He had slowly climbed back from the Shadowlands into the realm of the living again, to find night fallen and the battle over and the terrible valley silent with its dead. Slowly, dragging his injured foot behind him, he had searched among the fallen until at last he had found that which he sought. And now he knew what he must do.

He cleared away a patch of earth, clawing back the snow, and he laid out the bodies of his mother and father beside the bodies of his older brothers and his younger sister.

He set their weapons beside them. All but the great sword of his father, the mighty broadsword Sarkozan; that he took, for he would need it.

He kissed their cold lips one last time in farewell.

Then he began to pile the stones upon them.

There must be many stones, else the beasts would feed upon them in the night. Although he was bone-weary, and sick with loss of blood, he dragged the great stones one by one upon them, heaping up a tall cairn until it stood higher than a grown man. Then, and then only, did he rest; and by then he was shaking with exhaustion.

It would stand for the rest of time, that cairn, to mark the place where Thumithar of the Valklings had fallen. Or until the mighty continent itself, riven asunder with earthquake, was drowned beneath the cold waves of the sea.

He sang the warrior's song over them, his clear young voice sharp and strong and strange to hear in that deathly silence.

THE BLACK SKY lit with cold glory as the great golden Moon of old Lemuria rose up over the edges of the world to flood the bleak land of Valkarth with her light.

In the cold flame of the moonlight, he saw that the cairn was high and strong. The white bears would not claw it asunder, nor the grey wolves, to feast of what lay beneath.

At the thought, his jaws tight-

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ened and his lips clamped together. For the white bear of the Northlands was the totem beast of the enemy clan who had worked this day's red ruin, even as the black hawk of the skies was his own tribal totem.

He hated the mighty *ulth*, the white bear of the snow countries, and had oft hunted him down the bleak hills of this wintry land. And now he had another reason for that hatred.

The cairn was done; and he was finished here.

But there was one last task the dead had set upon him.

And its name was Vengeance.

CHAPTER 3.
Demon of the Snows

HE GATHERED up his gear and was ready to depart. From the dead, he took what he needed, nor did it bother him to plunder them. They were the men of his race, and the blood that lay strewn upon the snows about them, that same blood ran hot and fierce in his own veins. They would not begrudge him what he needed of them. Nor would they need it any longer.

From one he took the black leathern trappings that were warriors' harness, the leathern yoke studded with discs of brass that fitted about the throat to protect the shoulders, the affair of buckled straps and the great brass ring that shielded the midsection from the flat of a blade, the iron-studded girdle worn low about the hips, the heavy boots, the broad-bladed dagger and the twin leathern bottles, one filled with water and one with wine. His sword he slid into its worn old scabbard, which he clipped to a baldric and slung it across his chest so that the scabbard hung high between his shoulders.

He was not truly of age to don warriors' harness, for he had not yet undergone initiation into the rites of manhood by the old shaman of his nation. Nor would he now, for the garrulous old tosspot lay dead across the vale, having slain a dozen Snow Bear warriors with a two-handed axe before they cut him down. Had not this day befallen, he would with summer have gone up into the high mountains, there to dwell alone amid the heights, drinking the water of melted snow and eating only what he could slay with his bare hands; there would he have dwelt for forty days until the vision of his totem came to him and he learned his secret name.

Now that would never be. But manhood was upon him without the old rites.

Vengeance is for men. It is not a task for boys.

HALF THE NIGHT was worn away. He crossed the valley and climbed the hills, ignoring the pain in his injured foot. Strong red wine had warmed his numb flesh and it drove new strength

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and vigor through his tired frame. The cold, thin air of the heights cleared his throbbing head and the exertion of the ascent made the blood tingle in his veins.

There would be time enough to rest, later, when the deed was done.

If he lived . . .

The Moon was high in the heavens now; the night sky was black as death and the stars blazed like diamonds strewn on dark velvet. He thought of nothing as he climbed, neither of the dead he had left behind him in the valley, nor of those he went to kill, but merely of setting his foot upon first one rock and then upon a higher one until at last he came to the crest and the wide world fell away beneath him to every side and the stars seemed very near.

Here a saddle-shaped depression sloped between twin hill-crests, thick with virgin snow. It had fallen here, mayhap, when the world was young and fresh and the Gods still went among men to teach them the nine crafts and the seven arts.

He began to wade through the snow between the twin peaks. With each step he stirred snows that had lain for a thousand years, and the crystals swirled up before him like ancient ghosts awakened by the step of a rash intruder into places better left undisturbed.

His nape-hairs prickled and the flesh of his forearms crept. He had a sense that something was aware of his coming, that something—*roused.*

The cold breath of fear blew along his nerves, and it was colder than any snow. One hand went to his breast where a fetish of white stone lay over his heart, suspended about his neck on a thong. He muttered aloud the name of Gorm, his god.

And terror woke, roaring!

Was it a sudden gust of wind which raised the snow before him in a whirling cloud—a cloud that shaped itself into a mighty, towering form—a phantom-thing of numb snow that reared up before him on legs like tree-trunks, hunched shoulders massive and monstrous, huge paws raised to crush and tear, dripping jaws agape, red eyes of madness glaring into his?

He fell into a fighting stance and the great blade was alive and singing in his hand, starlight glittering on the blue steel, acid-etched sigils blazing with eerie fires.

The thing came lumbering towards him. And he knew no steel could slay it, for it did not really live.

CHAPTER 4.
Vengeance in the Night

THE GIGANTIC, WHITE, hulking monster was almost upon the boy now. He knew it for an *ulth*, a snow bear, but twice the girth and height of any *ulth* ever seen

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by mortal eyes before.

He knew also that it was a ghost-thing, that demon of the snows. For there poured from it a freezing cold, inhuman and magical. The sheen of perspiration on his bronze limbs froze like a thin sheath of glass upon his body. The icy breath of those fanged jaws panted in his face and he felt his face go dead and numb as if he wore a mask of snow.

A red haze thickened before his eyes, blinding him. Each breath he drew was like fire stabbing in his lungs, cold fire, black yet burning. He fought against the cold that coiled about him, swung Sarkozan high, glittering against the stars, and hewed and cut at the ghost-bear. But from each stroke he took hurt, for a wave of stunning cold went through him as the steel blade touched the lumbering monster of snow.

He fought on, knowing death was near; flesh could not long endure such cold. His heart was a frozen thing in his breast; his very blood congealed in his veins; he could no longer breathe, for to draw in each breath was as painful as a blade of ice driven deep into his lungs. But he fought on, and would fight until he fell.

A piercing cry cut through him from above.

Through snow-thick lashes he peered up to see a weird and fantastic shape, black and bewinged, beating against the stars.

He could not see it clearly—a moving blackness, blotting out the starlight—its eyes like golden fire, brighter than any star, and moonlight glittering on beak and outstretched claws.

It fell like a thunderbolt from above, swept by him like a whirlwind, and swung down upon the white bear-thing with a scream of fury.

The mountains shook as the two came together, and the stars were blotted out.

Ragged black wings beat with cyclone force. Shaggy white jaws roared and crunched. Scythe-sharp black blaws caught at the white breast and tore it asunder. The white thing moaned, and toppled, and came apart in chunks of broken snow.

The black shape whirled about and glared at the boy for the space of a single heart-beat.

And eyes of burning gold blazed deep into golden eyes.

Then the black wings spread and caught the wind and it was gone and Thongor lay gasping in the snow, the sword fallen from his nerveless hand.

Agony lanced through him as circulation returned to his half-frozen body. Hot blood went pumping through numb flesh; he shook his head dully, trying to waken his sluggish, frozen brain.

He had attained manhood, after all.

He had gone up on the heights alone, and there the vision had come to him, and he had seen his totem-beast, and learned his True Name.

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And he was blest above all the warriors of his tribe since time began: for the beast of his vision was the Black Hawk of Valkarth itself, the symbol of his race. And he knew then that his destiny would be stranger and more wondrous and more terrible than that of other men.

And he had seen a prophecy, too.

He had seen the Black Hawk fight and slay the Snow Bear. The ghost-beasts had fought there on the windy heights near to the blazing stars, and from that fight the Black Hawk had borne away the victory.

He drank down cold wine, and rested for a time.

Then he went on, to make the prophecy come true.

IT WAS the month of Garang in late spring, and the thaws had begun. The great snows that lay thick upon the heights and that cumbered the steep slope of the cliffs was rotten and lay loose, water trickling here and there. When he crossed over to the other side of the ridge he could look down on the valley where the tents of the Snow Bear tribe stood black against the snow, which reddened, now, to the first shafts of dawn.

They were weary after the long battle, the Snow Bear warriors —those of them that had survived. They had killed and killed and come away with the Black Hawk treasure of mammoth-ivory and red gold and with those of the Black Hawk women and girl-children who had not been fortunate enough to die beside their men.

They had feasted long, drunk deep, and caroused lustily and late, the victorious Snow Bear warriors. And now they slept heavily, gorged on meat and blood and wine and womanflesh.

From that sleep they would not awaken.

For a long moment the boy stood, arms folded against his breast, looking down on the camp.

His face was grim and expressionless, like a mask cast in hard bronze. He was a boy in years, but the iron of manhood had entered his soul. He knew what he must do; the spirits of the dead called to him in the windy silence, and he hearkened, and bent to the task.

With the great sword he began to cut the snow away.

It was not hard to do; the growing warmth of a Northlands spring had done half the job for him. The broken masses of snow began to roll down the steep, high slopes; as they came whirling down, they broke more snow loose, and each mass became a greater mass, until at last a mountain of heavy snow poured like a ponderous white river down the cliffs to collide in thunder on the floor of the valley below.

They had put up their tents close under the cliffs, the Snow

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Bear warriors, to block away the wind. Now it was snow that came down upon them, not wind, and by the time the avalanche came thundering down upon the tents it weighed many tons.

It crushed them into the earth, smothered them and their treasure and the ruined, broken, empty-eyed women they had taken captive; and in that thundering white fury not one lived.

The tribes of Valkarth have a simple faith.

Only those brave warriors who face the foe, and fight, and fall in battle, only their bold spirits are borne by the War Maids to the Hall of Heroes, to feast eternity away before the throne of Father Gorm.

And what of they that die by accident, in gross and drunken slumber? The shamans shrug and do not say. But they did not die the death of men, the death of warriors; the Hall of Heroes does not ope to such as they. Their miserable souls slink cringing through the grey mists and cold shadows of the Underworld forever.

The vengeance of Thongor was completed.

CHAPTER 5.
Red Dawn

MORNING LIT the east and the stars fled, one by one, before the red shafts of dawn.

When Thongor had made certain that not a single foe survived the avalanche, he turned away and set his face to the sun.

The task was accomplished, and he had lived.

Where, now, would he go? To a valley of corpses and an empty hut, whose walls would ring no more to his father's joyous laughter and his mother's quiet, crooning songs?

Not there; he could not go back.

But where, then? No other tribe would take him in, for life in the Northlands was a grim, bleak struggle for existance, and every mouth that is fed means that another must go hungry.

His people were extinct; there was nowhere for him to go.

And then it was that a verse from the old warriors' song he had sung over his father's grave for a dirge returned to him. And he bethought him of the Southlands, of the Dakshina, the lush jungle-countries that lay beside the warm waters of the Gulf, beyond the Mountains of Mommur to the south.

There, bright young cities glittered in the bold sun, with green gardens, and laughing girls. There, fiery kings and princes contended in mighty wars, and kingdoms lay ripe and ready for the taking. He thought of gold and gems, of fruit warm from the sun, of whirling battles on the green plains, of darkeyed, barbaric women . . .

And he set the great broad-

(continued on page 129)

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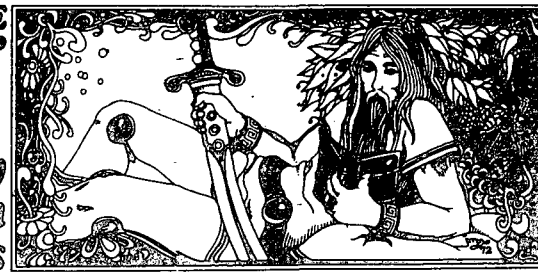
L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers



WILLIAM MORRIS
JACK OF ALL ARTS

IN THE EIGHTEENTH century, fantasy had been out of style ever since Cervantes, around 1600, had murdered the medieval romance by burlesquing it in *Don Quixote*. Then it reëntered the stream of European literature through three channels. One was the oriental extravaganza. This began to take form when, early in the century, the French orientalist Antoine Galland began publishing translations of parts of the *Arabian Nights*.

The second channel was the Gothic tale of supernatural horror, brought from its native Germany by Sir Horace Walpole with his *The Castle of Otranto* (1864). The third was the peasant folk-tale, which mythographers like Andersen and the Grimm brotheres began to collect and write down in the early nineteenth century.

About the same time, Sir Walter Scott created the modern historical novel. There had been many tales of days of yore—Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for example. But Scott, with *Waverly* (1814) and its many successors, was the first fully to grasp the fact that the past had differed in significant ways from the present and that these differences of costume and custom could be exploited for their entertainment value.

Scott's novels touched off a wave of romantic medievalism in the British Isles. Rich men built synthetic medieval ruins on their estates. The entrance to the grounds of Dunsany Castle in Ireland has such a "folly"—a spurious Norman guard tower.

In 1817, when a man named Ashford accused another man, Thornton, of murdering Ashford's sister, Thornton challenged Ashford to appear in the lists in full armor for trial by battle. When Ashford failed to appear, armored or otherwise, Thornton claimed to have won his case. The lawyers found to their amazement that in-

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deed he had; trial by battle had never been officially abolished. Then in 1839 a sporting young peer, Lord Eglinton, at enormous expense, put on the last genuine tournament on his Scottish estates. Alas for romance; it poured!

This wave of medievalist enthusiasm affected a whole generation of British architects, who speckled Britain with Gothic churches and public buildings; of British artists, who painted Arthurian characters in anachronistic plate armor and soulful attitudes; and of British writers, who wrote medieval romances in prose and poetry.

One of these was John Ruskin (1819-1900), critic, lecturer, teacher, writer, and reformer. The son of a rich Scottish liquor dealer, Ruskin gave away his inherited fortune piece by piece, having in late years become convinced that it was wicked to live on interest. Having annulled their marriage on grounds of Ruskin's impotence, Ruskin's wife then married Ruskin's friend the painter Millais. This seems to have been a more satisfactory arrangement all around.

Ruskin wrote voluminously on art, architecture, economics, education, morals, politics, and religion. Appalled by the lot of the Victorian workingman, he thought that the common man had been better off in the Middle Ages. One of his utopian proposals was for a commune based on the laws of fourteenth-century Florence.

In fact, the picture of the Middle Ages entertained by romantic medievalists like Ruskin was about as accurate as the "noble savage" concept of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Medieval European feudalism was, outside of India, one of the most closed, caste-bound, and rigidly stratified societies that the world has seen.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), painter, poet, son of an Italian refugee and nephew of Byron's physician, was a friend of Millais and a protegé of Ruskin. Rossetti, Millais, and several others founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which pursued the ideal of painting with minute, literal, detailed accuracy. In other words, they were trying to do what color photography now does better and with infinitely less effort.

Under the influence of these idealists and esthetes came William Morris (1834-96), one of the most versatile, vigorous, and accomplished creators of the lot. Like Ruskin, Morris inherited money; unlike Ruskin, he developed a hard business head and during most of his life made a good living. Architect, decorator, designer, novelist, painter, poet, and printer, Morris tried his hand at most of the arts and did outstanding work in most of those that he tried. It was an accidental afterthought that he took a key position in the history of heroic fantasy—or, as some prefer to call it, sword-and-sorcery fiction.

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Morris wrote the novels in which he pioneered this sub-genre in his last years, as a form of relaxation rather than with a commercial motive.

Morris was a short young man who became a stout middle-aged man. Strong and athletic, he was a furious fencer. His mop of dark, curly hair earned him the nickname of "Topsy." His manner was boisterous, energetic, abrupt, and brusque, with a loud, explosive way of speaking. Excitable and hot-tempered, he had a congenital nervous instability that appeared in more acute form in his epileptic daughter. His explosions of temper soon blew over and were usually followed by humble apologies. In character he was upright, generous, kind, and idealistic.

At Oxford, Morris studied at first for the Church, then switched to architecture. On graduation, he worked for nine months in an architect's office but then quit to devote his full time to painting.

He also, at Oxford, formed several lifelong friendships. When he had become an able painter, he and Rossetti, together with half a dozen of these friends, launched a scheme to paint and decorate the new Union Society building at Oxford. The young men had a glorious time, although their inexperience caused their murals to fade away and vanish during the following decades.

For use in his drawings, Morris designed a set of early fourteenth-century arms and armor and had it made by a local blacksmith. When Morris tried on the helmet, the visor stuck. His colleagues were convulsed to see Morris dancing about, tugging at the refractory basinet, and roaring with rage inside it.

At this time, the late 1850s, Rossetti and Morris employed two beautiful lower-class young women as models. One was Elizabeth Siddal, to whom Rossetti became engaged. The other was Jane Burden, with whom Morris fell in love. Shy and awkward with women, he wooed her by reading aloud to her and writing yearning poems to her eyes:

So beautiful and kind they are,
But most times looking out afar,
Waiting for something, not for me.
Beata mea Domina!

Although an irresponsible wastrel, Rossetti had a Victorian sense of propriety. Therefore he felt honor bound to marry Elizabeth Siddal, even though he had cooled towards her and begun casting amorous eyes on Jane Burden. To keep Jane within the group as a model, and either (one may suppose) to give his friend happiness or to keep her within pouncing distance, he persuaded Jane to marry Morris.

Morris married Jane in 1859. Rossetti married Elizabeth the following year. Morris begat two

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daughters, of whom the elder became an epileptic. The younger shed her husband after a brief marriage (involving a triangle with the young George Bernard Shaw) and devoted the rest of her life to enshrining her father's memory.

Elizabeth died of tuberculosis after two years of marriage. Rossetti buried a manuscript of his poems in her coffin; but, when he needed money, he dug her up and retrieved the manuscript.

For a few years, Morris was happy with Jane but then was made aware that he did not seem to be good for her. Jane—tall, black-haired, long-necked, with a long, aquiline nose—was a stableman's daughter who easily made the transition into the gentry. But her health declined, with backaches and fainting fits —possibly psychosomatic.

In the late 1860s, by all indications, Jane had begun an active if discreet love affair with Rossetti. This continued for the next decade, until Rossetti's health broke down from alcoholism and narcotics.

Poor Morris made the best of a sticky situation, since the modern facilities for easy divorce and remarriage were not available. In that time and place, divorced persons were automatically excluded from "society" along with tradesmen, workingmen, Jews, illegitimates, and persons caught cheating at cards or welshing on gambling debts.

In the other departments of life, however, Morris enjoyed spectacular success. In 1861, Morris and several friends formed Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company to engage in house decoration and the manufacture of the materials therefor: textiles, tapestries, hangings, furniture, wall paper, carpets, and stained glass. Morris, who was very good with his hands, insisted on learning the technique of each step of his manufacturing operations himself. When an associate suggested an armchair with an adjustible back, Morris adopted and marketed it as the Morris chair.

An implacable perfectionist, Morris turned out exquisite work, charged high prices, and deferred to no customers no matter how exalted. They found a burly, full-bearded man in a workman's smock and one of those little round hats that were the Victorian substitute for the topper. Spattered with paint or smeared with grease, he gruffly quoted his steep prices to the gentry on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. If he sometimes blew up and roared at his workmen, they took it in good part, since he treated them on a basis of man-to-man equality.

Morris moved both his home and his plant several times, to places in London and its suburbs. Each time, he decorated his new house himself.

The company had ups and downs but in the long run proved quite successful; a succession of good accountants saved it from

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some of Morris's more eccentric decisions. In 1874, Morris forced a reorganization, which put him in sole charge. This move left some hard feelings among the other shareholders. Morris's friendship with Rossetti, which had survived their *ménage à trois*, broke up at last.

This, however, was but one activity of this many-sided man. In the 1860s, Morris became interested in the Viking Age. He studied Icelandic and translated several sagas, including the great *Völsunga Saga*. In 1871 and 1873 he visited Iceland with his friend Faulkner. Looking a little like Santa Claus in the kind of broad sombrero then called a "wide-awake," Morris trotted on a shaggy Icelandic pony over fields of lava through fog and rain. He harangued the Icelanders in what he fondly thought was their native tongue, but of which they could scarcely understand a word. At one stop, his hostess made the visitors take off their pants before sitting down to dinner.

Meanwhile, as secretary of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, Morris tirelessly campaigned to save England's medieval relics from being either demolished by developers or "restored" out of all recognition. He was active in the National Liberal League, which campaigned against the government's pro-Turkish foreign policies, and similar organizations.

In 1883, disillusioned with these groups, Morris joined the Democratic Federation (later the Social Democratic Federation), founded two years before by a disciple of Karl Marx. Morris had long wanted a better deal for the British working class. In his translation of the *Vòlsunga Saga*, he had made the dragon-slaying Sigurd an unlikely crusader for social justice.

Thus Morris became a Socialist, as that term was then understood. The concept of Socialism was much vaguer, more variable and amorphous and inconsistent, than it is now; nor had the democratic, legalistic Socialists yet split with the revolutionary, authoritarian Communists. Morris fretted a little about being a Socialist and a capitalist at the same time. He once considered giving up his business to resolve this contradiction, but common sense prevailed. As it was, he spent much of his money financing the League and even sold his library to give the proceeds to the cause of Socialism. He took part in demonstrations, was twice arrested, and was furious when the judge let him, as a "gentleman," off with a scolding or a small fine but sent his working-class comrades to jail.

Morris's Socialism was, however, of a very peculiar, individual kind. For all his Socialistic professions, he clung to his medievalism. His medievalistic "Socialism" with its guilds and

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handicrafts led Friedrich Engels to dismiss him as a "sentimental" and "utopian" Socialist. Morris tried to read Marx but confessed that he could not make head or tail of Marx's theory of surplus value. (This is not to Morris's discredit, since the theory contains a glaring logical fallacy.)

As an antiquarian and devout medievalist, Morris had long opposed the less esthetic aspects of the Industrial Revolution. In his early twenties, when touring French cathedrals, he had denounced railroads as "abominations." Later he insisted that he was not against all labor-saving machinery. Some, he thought, was needed to perform the more repulsive kinds of necessary drudgery. In general, though, he cherished the illusion of the well-fed, healthy, contented medieval workman, happily whacking out gargoyles with hammer and chisel for the next cathedral.

It is amusing to compare Morris with another great literary archaist and anti-industrialist, N. P. Lovecraft. But, where Morris idealized the Middle Ages, Lovecraft idealized the eighteenth century, and each hated and despised the other's favorite period.

To support the population of Great Britain in the 1880s on a basis of medieval technology, it would have been necessary somehow to get rid of all but a small fraction of the people. But Morris was oblivious to such considerations.

In 1886, Morris wrote a novella or imaginative tract, *A Dream of John Ball*, in which he imagined himself back in the England of 1381, at the time of the peasant rebellion. Morris credited the rebels with Socialistic or Communistic aims of which they never dreamed. He did, however, realize the dangers of such mass uprisings to littérateurs like himself; since the rebels of 1381, viewing literacy as an enemy, made a bonfire of the books and manuscripts of Cambridge University and cut off the heads of persons whom they caught carrying pen and ink.

Morris wrote one more socialistic-utopian tracts, *News from Nowhere*, and then abandoned propaganda for pure romance. He had become a little disillusioned. Although still for Socialism in theory, he had been ousted from his editorship of *The Commonweal*, the SDF's organ, by an anarchist faction. Moreover, failing health compelled him to give up active speaking, demonstrating, and organizing. Despite his energy and robustness, he did not age well. He had long suffered from gout and in his fifties was increasingly assailed by exhaustion.

Morris's novels of heroic fantasy were all written in the last nine years of his life, from 1888 to 1896. They were *jeux d'esprit*, done for fun and relaxation, rather than attempts to write great liter-

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ature or to garner money and fame—although Morris saw to it that they were published. At this time, besides his decorator business, Morris was running a small press. The Kelmscott Press turned out books by Morris and others in beautifully printed and bound collector's editions.

The novels were written off and on during this period, sometimes overlapping and not published in the order in which they were written. In the story of Morris and his colleagues, these stories play but a small part. In the history of heroic fantasy, on the other hand, they bulk large indeed.

Two of Morris's earlier works of this group were *The House of the Wolfings* (1888) and *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889). These are non-fantastic historical novels, somewhat in the tradition of Scott. Both are full of the Nordicism that Morris had absorbed from the sagas and from his Icelandic journeys. As in his later works, they are written in a heavily archaistic style ("pastiche Jacobean," it has been called) with vast prolixity and glacial slowness.

The first, *The House of the Wolfings*, tells of the defeat by a German tribe of the invading Romans. The German barbarians—in history a singularly dirty, treacherous, and bloody lot—are cleaned up, prettified, and imbued with noble motives almost to the point of burlesque.

Next, *The Roots of the Mountains* tells of a similar conflict between the men of Burgdale and a swarm of bloodthirsty invaders called the Dusky Men. The Burgdalers are led by Face-of-god, a proper Nordic hero. The Dalesmen vaguely resemble Goths, and the Dusky Men the Huns, whence it is sometimes assumed that Morris had the historical conflict between these peoples in mind. Neither Goths nor Huns are named, however; and the terrain does not resemble the Russian prarie, where in the fourth century the Huns overthrew Hermanarich's short-lived Gothic steppe empire.

The depraved Dusky Men are driven out, and Face-of-god is united with his Sun-beam. Such is Morris's prolixity, however, that to read this huge novel through were a task to daunt the stoutest. His insistence on telling everything that befalls his characters every day, whether it affects the final outcome or not, reminds one of the old story about "Then another locust came and carried away another grain of corn."

In one episode, Face-of-god's father, Stone-face, warns his son of supernatural dangers:

"Even such an one I have seen time and agone, when the snow was deep and the wind was rough; and it was in the likeness of a woman clad in such raiment as the Bride wore last night, and she trod the snow light-foot in thin raiment where it would scarce bear the skids of a deft

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snow-runner. Even so she stood before me; the icy wind blew her raiment around her, and drifted the hair from her garlanded head toward me, and she was fair and fresh as in the midsummer days. Up the fell she fared, sweetest of all things to look on, and beckoned me to follow. . ."[1]

Compare this with Conan's encounter with Atali, in "The Frost Giant's Daughter" (*Conan of Cimmeria*, 1969, pp. 54ff) and it is hard not to suspect that Robert E. Howard had read this passage. I know of no direct evidence that Howard had read Morris; but it is likely that a voracious reader of Howard's tastes and interests would have come across *The Roots of the Mountains*.

In this novel, the supernatural element is negligible, since Stone-face's female wood-wight never appears on stage. In Morris's next, *The Glittering Plain*, however, the author definitely embarks upon the seas of faërie. He combined the antiquarian romanticism of Scott and his imitators with the supernaturalism of Walpole and *his* imitators, in language beautifully poetic and artfully archaic. Thus heroic fantasy was born.

In (to give it its full title) *The Story of the Glittering Plain, Which Has Been Also Called the Land of Living Men or the Acre of the Undying*, the Nordic hero Hallblithe finds that his betrothed, the Hostage, has been kidnapped by pirates from the Isle of Ransom. Going in search of her, at this isle he falls in with a local, called Puny Fox because the others there are giants and he is a mere seven feet.

The wily Puny Fox kids Hallblithe along until the latter leaves and goes to the Land of the Glittering Plain. This is a fairyland where nobody ages and old men are rejuvenated. Hallblithe declines the king's offer of his daughter's hand, escapes from the land, and returns to the Isle of Ransom. There he recovers his beloved. The trickster Puny Fox becomes his friend, and all go back to Hallblithe's home and live happily ever after.

This 65,000-word story is shorter than most of Morris's fantasies, which is to the good. It starts off well but tends to peter out. For one thing, Morris was not much on plot. His adventures and encounters "just happen." Morris could have defended himself by saying that he was writing, not a "modern" novel, but a medieval romance of the type of those of Chrestien de Troyes, Gottfried von Strassburg, Ludovico Ariosto, and Sir Thomas Malory. They never worried about intricate, logical, self-consistent plots.

Morris was trying to revive the kind of medieval prose narrative that had perished with the publication of *Don Quixote*. Hense, when Hallblithe returns to the Isle of Ransom and plays a minor trick on the pirates to regain his

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betrothed, they amiably let him go with her instead of more plausbily chopping him into small pieces. There is no explanation—not even why they kidnapped the maid in the first place.

Another besetting weakness of Morris as a storyteller also appears. His stories suffer, not from Victorian prudery—his characters enjoy a good roll in the hay as well as the next—but Victorian optimism. His imaginary worlds are just too mild and safe; there is too much sweetness and light and not enough conflict. His heroes have a relatively easy time, and when they do get in trouble there is usually a magical weapon or a good witch to get them out of it. His villains are not really very villainous and are often cajoled into reforming their evil ways.

In this respect, Morris stands at the other extreme from Robert Howard. Howard's heroes are grim, somber, hard-bitten fellows who suspect—usually rightly—that everyone they meet is out to cheat, rob, or murder them. Howard suffered from some profound internal maladjustment or unhappiness, which finally slew him but which gave him a tragic sense of life. Morris, on the other hand, aside from his marital complications, seems to have been a basically happy, jolly person, convinced of the fundamental goodness and benevolence of his fellow men—or of nearly all of them.

One more weakness of *The Glittering Plain*, to my way of thinking, is the very concept of the Acre of the Undying. To one who enjoys life, the idea of a land of eternal youth would have so strong an appeal that it would take the strongest possible motive—comparable to that which makes a man sacrifice his life in other contexts—to lead him to forgo it. The mere presence of such a concept in a story, therefore, makes the attainment of such a land the central plot element. To treat it casually is to introduce a jarring inconsistency, like bringing the atomic doom into one of P. G. Wodehouse's social comedies, or like Burroughs's Martians who have radium rifles that shoot a hundred miles but who still fight with swords and spears. The same difficulty appears in Tolkien's Grey Havens, Lloyd Alexander's Summer Country, and even in Baum's later Oz.

Still, the story has lasting historical interest as the first heroic fantasy, in my sense of the term, to be written. It combines an imaginary, invented pre-industrial world with the supernatural beings and forces that our own pre-scientific ancestors believed in, as in a child's fairy tale, but on an adult level.

The next of the series was *The Wood Beyond the World* (1895). Golden Walter is a typically tall, fair-haired, gray-eyed youth, whose wife betrays him with

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another man. Not wishing to start a feud with her family, he considers a trading voyage:

So this went on awhile till the chambers of his father's house, yea the very streets of the city, became loathsome to him; and yet he called to mind that the world was wide and he but a young man. So on a day as he sat with his father alone, he spake to him and said: Father, I was on the quays even now, and I looked on the ships that were nigh boun, and thy sign I saw on a tall ship that seemed to me nighest boun. Will it be long ere she sail? Nay, said his father, that ship, which hight the Katherine, will they warp out of the haven in two days' time. But why askest thou of her? The shortest word is best, father, said Walter, and this is it, that I would depart in the said ship and see other lands. Yea and whither, son? said the merchant. Whither she goeth, said Walter, for I am ill at ease at home, as thou wottest, father.[2]

The lack of quotation marks has good biblical precedent; but in his later works Morris put them back in. This prose is one at which the reader must work a little harder than in briskly contemporary English; but one can get used to it and find a certain musical charm in it. One is well-advised, however, to keep a dictionary handy for obsolete words like "boun" (ready). But it does no harm to enlarge one's vocabulary.

Walter sets out. Enroute, the family scrivener catches up with him to tell him that his father has been slain in a brawl with Walter's wife's family.

Here Morris's weakness as a plotter appears. We are prepared for the story of Walter's return and revenge. But then the story goes off on an entirely different tack. Walter never does get home, so that these complications prove irrelevant. Did Morris find the theme of the adulterous wife too painful to pursue?

Instead, Walter is blown to a far land. He has adventures in a castle run by an enchantress, served by a captive maiden and a wicked, apelike dwarf. Walter and the maiden flee the castle and have more adventures in the land of a race of gaint stone-age hunters. At last they come to a city, where they are hailed as king and queen, on the implausible ground that the king of the city has died without issue, and their custom is to enthrone the next passing stranger. Presumably, nobody is likely to serve Walter with a bigamy warrant in that far land.

This plot has three glaring defects. First is the change in direction of the story, already mentioned. Second is that the most exciting part, the escape from the enchanted castle, is in the middle of the book instead of just before the end as in a well-wrought tale. Finally, the coronation of Walter and his maiden is one of the longest reaches of the arm of coincidence on record. It baldly

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exposes Morris's tendency to "legislate himself out of trouble."

Still, the novel has many pleasant parts and considerable suspense in the castle episode.

At about the same time as the previous novel, Morris wrote *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, beginning:

Whilom, as tells the tale, was a walled cheaping-town hight Utterhay, which was builded in a bight of land a little off the great highway which went from over the mountains to the sea.[3]

The protagonist is the heroine Birdalone, stolen as an infant from her native town by a witch, who rears her in the wood of Evilshaw to be her maid-of-all-work. Coming to maturity, Birdalone steals the witch's magical boat and is taken by it to a series of marvelous islands, the Isle of the Young and the Old and so forth.

On one island, Birdalone falls in with three more maidens who are captives of another witch. The three maids mourn their lovers, three paladins who dwell in the Castle of the Quest.

Birdalone reached the Castle of the Quest and sets the three heroes on the track of their sweethearts. After complications, kidnappings, fights, and enchantments, one paladin is slain. The maidens are rescued. One gets her original paladin; the one whose paladin is dead gets another man; and the third loses her man to Birdalone and is left lamenting.

One captive maiden is named Aurea. This name also appears, probably not by coincidence, as that of the heroine's sister in Fletcher Pratt's *The Well of the Unicorn*. Birdalone also has a fairy godmother, Habundia, who appears to help her through crises.

Although the story is more logically plotted than its predecessors, I have, I regret to say, enjoyed it the least of any. I found it dreadfully prolix, long-winded, and icky-sweet.

Next came the magnum opus of the series: *The Well at the World's End* (1896). (Morris seems to have found glamor in the letter *w*.) It is, much the longest of these novels. with the possible exception of *The Roots of the Mountains*, With nearly a quarter of a million words, it belongs in the same class as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. It is also, probably, the best of the lot, even though the reader may weary of Morris's technique of "another locust took away another grain."

The tale tells of the King of Upmeads, whose four sons set out to seek their fortunes. The story follows the youngest, Ralph, who undergoes many adventures: He is involved in the war between the Champions of the Dry Tree and the Burg of the Four Friths, and with the Lady of Abundance, with whom he has a hot love affair until one of her other suitors jealously slays her.

Hearing of the miraculous Well

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at the World's End, Ralph sets out for it. He becomes involved with the tyrant of Utterbol and his queen, who wants Ralph for her fancy man. Ralph escapes with a young woman whom he already knows. They get to the Well, drink of its waters, and are transformed into superpersons. On the way back, whenever they meet a gang of villains, Ralph has only to wave his sword and scowl. The scoundrels, recognizing his power, flee in terror or grovel in submission.

Tolkienians will be interested to learn that the tyrant of Utterbol is named "Gandolf," and that Ralph's horse is called "Silverfax." Tolkien was in fact influenced by Morris along with many others. Among such widely-read literary men, it is hard to be sure by whom they have *not* been influenced.

The last story of the group, save for some fragments, is *The Sundering Flood,* published posthumously after Morris's death in 1896. He finished the rough draft less than a month before his end, following a rapid decline of several months. The final pages were dictated to a friend when Morris could no longer write. May Morris edited the manuscript, tidying up inconsistencies and adding a few passages to bridge gaps. In the present paperback edition, these interpolations are put in brackets.

The story tells of Osberne Wolfgrimsson, who lives in an isolated stead at Wethermel, east of an uncrossable river. He loves the maiden, Elfhild, who lives across the river. He is also befriended by a supernatural being, who takes divers forms and gives him the invincible sword Broadcleaver.

A foreign horde, the Red Skinners, invade the land, and Elfhild vanishes. Sorrowing, Osberne becomes a soldier for Sir Godrick of Longshaw. Osberne learns of the city at the mouth of the Sundering Flood. As an officer of Sir Godrick, he helps to overthrow the king of this city and the clique of rich merchants who oppress the virtuous workers of the guilds. (Here Morris's Socialism surfaces.)

At last Osberne finds Elfhild, living with an old kinswoman of magical powers in a house in the Wood Masterless. Thither they had fled after various adventures and perils. All return to Wethermel and live happily ever afterwards.

The story is better plotted than most of Morris's. In entertainment quality, it is perhaps second to *The Well at the World's End.* On the other hand, *The Sundering Flood* has serious flaws. The tale starts with glacial sloth, since Osberne does not even leave Wethermel until more than halfway through.

Elfhild's adventures, which had the potential of strong suspense, are not presented directly but are narrated by Elfhild after her reunion with her lover. Morris would

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have been better advised to have condensed his leisurely first half down to a fraction of its present length and to have used the space in direct narration of Elfhild's adventures—perhaps alternating with Osberne's, as Burroughs did with John Carter and Deja Thoris.

The hero's supernatural friend and magical weapon are clichés of Morris's novels. In providing the hero with too easy a way out of his plights, they detract from rather than add to the strength of the story. (Tolkien had a similar tendency to "legislate his way out of trouble"; so did Howard, in giving his heroes such invincible thews.)

Morris would doubtless have explained that thus things were done in medieval romances; and he was writing, not a modern novel, but a synthetic medieval romance. That is all very well, but it still remains that fictional techniques have advanced since medieval times. While in one sense it is true that "there is no such things as progress in the arts," from the technical point of view there have been advances. A modern artist may be not a whit more gifted than one of the Crô-Magnards who painted the spirited horses, bison, and mammoths on the walls of Font-de-Gaume in southwestern France; but the modern painter has far better paints, brushes, and painting surfaces than his paleolithic predecessor.

Likewise, in storytelling techniques, we now know how to do things better than they did in the days of Layamon and Hartmann von Aue. To scorn this knowledge were like a modern painter who insists on grinding his own pigments and applying them with fingers and sticks to the bumpy walls of the nearest cave.

Still, we can excuse many shortcomings in a pioneer, and Morris pioneered heroic fantasy. His successors merely stand on his shoulders. He has been widely read among other literary swordsmen and sorcerers. The battle on the causeway in *The Sundering Flood*, for instance, reads suspiciously like the similar battle in Pratt's *The Well of the Unicorn*. Not that the latter was a conscious plagiarism; but characters and incidents that a writer has read about in his youth are apt to appear in his fiction later, even though he may have consciously forgotten them.

Lastly, the works do contain much beauty, music, and color. Any fan of heroic fantasy should have tried at least one of these novels. Who knows? He may find that something in them strikes a chord in his own soul, so that he cannot rest until he has tracked down and gobbled the rest.

NOTES

1. Wlliam Morris: *The Roots of the Mountains* (Lon.: 1913), p. 76.

2. W. M.: *The Wood Beyond the World* (N.Y.: 1969), pp. 2f.

3. M. W.: *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (N.Y.: 1971), p. 1.

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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POETS AND HUMANS

GEO. ALEC EFFINGER

Several years ago Jeff Jones showed me a painting he was working on and suggested that when he was finished with it, it might make a good cover for this magazine. I agreed and subsequently I suggested that Geo. Alec Effinger have a look at the painting and see if it suggested a story to him. He did, and it did, and this is it. . .

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

THERE WAS A HILL outside the city of the wasps, and from its blue top one could look down to the low collection of mud and paper mounds or to the forest, around the other side of the hill. There the trees were low and sprawling, and their tangled branches discouraged the inspection of the giant wasps. Generally the hunting parties flew off in the other direction, over the wide, featureless plain. Only the peculiar and solitary members of their society came to the hill itself, and Ched Jeken Chak Kejel was one of the few that could appreciate the scene.

Jeken dipped his head rapidly with pleasure. In the pale sky the sun shone brightly, and it felt good as it warmed the chitinous plates of his thorax. He closed his mind to the distant thoughts of his fellow citizens; he could not hear the busy thinking of the foragers nearby or the noisy undertone of the city. Jeken subdued his senses, one by one. The sky, the hill, the city vanished as he released himself from visual activity. The rough blue grass beneath his feet grew suddenly irritating, as he turned his mind to his tactile centers. These, too, were blanked, and then Jeken felt nothing at all. He channeled all of his concentration into amplifying his weak olfactory powers, and soon he nodded in sensual enjoyment.

Even as he grew older, he came more often to the hill. He had passed three summer seasons and three winters, and could expect to live another three years. He should have given up his sensuousness long ago; at his age it was almost criminal behavior. Jeken tried vainly to describe his sudden ecstasies and his flurries of joy, but his brothers were much too busy. Jeken smelled the faint, sweet fragrance of the grass, a sensation that delighted him. His exploration of smells soon grew

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tiring, however, and he let his trance fade.

He saw a human climbing the hill.

From the wasp's viewpoint, the human was tiny, about one quarter his size. It climbed slowly up the steep hill, and because of its short height was evidently bothered by the tall, stubborn grass. Jeken recalled the stories he had heard seasons ago, about humans and their magic powers. He had never seen one before and he didn't know what to do.

Jeken stood very still. His wings had been raised and they waved slowly during his trance, but now he folded them quietly against his black body. He watched the human working its way toward him, still unaware of his presence. After a few seconds the human looked up and saw him, and stopped in its tracks. It stared at Jeken, and neither of them moved. The wasp decided to call to it and reassure it. He opened his mind for communication, wondering if a creature so tiny could have a brain developed enough to understand.

At first Jeken was frightened by the strength of the human's emotions. The human mind was filled with terror and helplessness, but the emotions were expressed chaotically. Jeken realized suddenly that he was touching the mind of something *else*, and was surprised by the amount that he could appreciate. The human was not so much different as just narrow.

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And it was afraid. As the seconds passed the human's thoughts organized themselves into discarded plans of attack or flight. Jeken himself was anxious, but only because he had been confronted with one of his dreams.

Jeken thought slowly and clearly to the human. "Quiet," he thought. "I do not want to hurt you. You do not have to run. Be quiet now; let me talk with you. Be quiet."

The human still had not moved. Jeken knew no facts about its race, and the only available fantasies warned him that the human was likely to vanish magically if he lost sight of it. He gazed motionlessly, projecting calming thoughts. The human was deciding to run; it was apparently too stunned with fear to offer its bewitched ransom. Jeken realized that he must stalk the human as the females sometimes hunted the small animals of the plain.

"Do not run," he thought, walking very slowly toward the human. As the human saw him begin to move, its mind flushed against with terror. The human's face writhed horribly, and its thoughts screamed in Jeken's mind. "Be quiet," thought Jeken, but the human turned and ran down the hill toward the forest.

"I'll never find it if it goes in there," thought Jeken, rising above the prickly blue grass in a lazy orientation spiral. He flew after the human, but even though he was led by its broadcast of alarm he lost it within the dense forest. He hovered above the drab brown trees for most of the afternoon, and soon there were no more hints from a human mind to guide him. Disappointed, he flew back over the hill toward the paper city of the wasps.

Sometimes Jeken found even his home beautiful. From above, the colony was an irregular collection of grays and browns. It stretched from the bottom of the hill in a fat oval a half mile long, across the tan-colored plain. In the center of the city were covered cells, white with sun-dried age, the original walls of the small founding swarm. The busy workers had extended the boundaries further as the community grew; some travelled to the plain or the forest to gather vegetable matter to be molded into cells; other combined soil with saliva; still others dug burrows in the ground. The plant pulp walls were gray, the earthen cells were very light sepia, and the ground between them was rich brown. No grass grew among the twisting streets of the wasps' settlement. That had all long ago been converted to food.

Jeken was excited by his experience, but once more within the city he felt the hostile attitude of the working members. Most of the others were building new cells for the housing of eggs over the winter. Some were putting down layers of honeypaper, the chief food of the adult wasps.

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Jeken saw lines of foragers returning from the plain, already beginning to turn the juices of the plants to honey, which would be regurgitated and layed to dry on the city's supply. His mind was cluttered with orders and greetings, and only he seemed to mind the racket. He made his way to the proper refectory, and there met Credek, another adult male.

"Credek," thought Jeken. "Your work is not finished."

"Jeken. And yours," thought Credek. The two nibbled at the honeypaper amid a nervous silence, for both knew Jeken's status as a deviate.

"Something strange happened today," said Jeken in the wasps' efficient telepathy. "I saw a human. I could not speak with it."

Credek said nothing. He dissolved some more of the honeypaper in his mouth, considering the sincerity of his idle brother. "Did it grant you a wish?" he asked sarcastically.

"It escaped. I will seek it again."

The wasps were never openly angered if one of their number shirked his responsibility, and so Credek did not care what Jeken did with his time. "If you're not careful," he said, "the human will enslave you and you'll have to eat dust for the rest of your life."

Jeken did not interpret the other's mocking manner. "I do not think so. It seemed much too frightened of me. They're just as unused to seeing us as we to them." He finished his meal, eating less of the honeypaper than Credek out of an embarrassed guilt. He followed the tunnel underground for a great distance, and emerged on the far end of the colony from the human's hill.

Around him the working wasps were busily enlarging the boundaries of the city-nest. A few tunnels had been extended into the new area, and low mounds of darker soil revealed their routes. In the spaces among the tunnels the wasps were building new cells. Foragers flew in with spheres of vegetable material tucked securely between their mandibles. The matter was chewed and mixed with water from the wasps' crop. The pulp was then formed into a wall of a new cell; as the worker straddled her new creation, her antennae carefully followed the interior walls of the two adjacent cells as guides. When she came to the periphery one antenna hung outside, and that exterior wall was curved. The cell would become perfectly hexagonal only when it was completely surrounded by others.

Jeken watched the workers and listened to their distracted thoughts. His head dipped in appreciation of their cooperation and the promise of life that it held. He was clothed with the sense of community, and the airy spirit of fellowship warmed him. It was this ability to grasp the unity that

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prevented him from submerging himself in the ruling, working fervor. He was an observer, he was a celebrant, he was a poet.

He had watched the building dances many times, enjoying the skill of the workers as they tamped the pulp with their mouth parts into perfect hexagons to house the future's eggs. But today he watched from a new perspective; he had seen a human. For the first time he examined his conception of the world. Where before all had existed to facilitate the life of the wasps, now he began to see the world as many organisms, all trying to find their own lives and their own salvations in procreation. Dimly, tenatively, Jeken aroused within himself the idea of a world of many species of plants and animals, of a true interdependent environment. His pleasure while watching his sister wasps faded as he pictured the greater community of nature. His idea of the world expanded, growing beyond the city to the hill and forest, across the plain, beyond that further than anyone had ever foraged, and still further. Jeken was excited by his thoughts, but no one would listen, and he could only know frustration.

He had to find the human again. Jeken knew that he was alone, more now than ever before. Along with the joy of nature's partnership came the horror of being inconsequential and the pain of futility. The human was his only link with meaning. It was certain proof that the blind building of the wasps was not all of creation; how did those supernatural creatures, the humans, live? Did they eat, did they breathe? Did they laugh in their leafy homes at the slaving, slaving wasps?

Jeken wondered what his purpose was. He and his brother might live six years, a very short time. Too short, in fact, to permit periods of rest, play, or non-vital creativity. Near the end of its sixth year Jeken's generation of males would become sexually mature. They would die shortly after mating with a fertile female. The females would live a few years longer, at times activating the stored sperm cells and laying groups of eggs. New colonies would be founded, old ones would be repopulated. But, surely, no one would recall the names of any of the ancestors. It all seemed now to Jeken like a supreme waste of energy.

Dozens of new cells had been built while Jeken pondered. He watched a worker, like most an infertile female. Skillfully she shaped the cell, careful to keep it at a uniform height with the old ones. "I am going to find a human," said Jeken.

"Bring me a fat bird with your wishes," said the worker scornfully. Jeken did not reply. He flew over the plain's moundgate, followed the gray boundary tunnel, turned over the forest moundgate, and on to the hill. He

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landed and folded his wings along his back, keeping motionless and watching in the direction of the trees. He waited a long time, but saw nothing unusual. When night came he still had seen no sign of a human. He did not fly back to the city; for the first time in his life he spent the night on the hill. As the temperature dropped he became drowsier. His thoughts slowed and his senses dulled, so that hours later he was shocked by the rising of the sun. It took a few moments for him to orient himself and shake off the evening's torpor.

The day passed, and Jeken was alone on the hill. After a while he tried to enjoy the fragrances of the area, but they made him think of the triviality and the sadness of life. To work was to ignore the problem; not to work was to admit it and find another way to ignore it. There was more to express than mere happiness, and Jeken felt too weak to try. He passed another night on the hill, his six feet clutching the grass tightly.

The next morning, after he revived for the day, he discovered a human standing near him, staring at him, its thoughts anxious but calm.

"Hello. My name is Rhennel," thought the human. When it thought, its mouth parts moved hideously.

"Are you the same human I saw two days ago?" asked Jeken.

"Yes."

The wasp said nothing for a moment. He was surprised and a bit mistrustful of the human. "I am Jeken," he said at last. "I am an adult male."

"I am an adult female," said Rhennel.

Jeken was amazed. He had never thought that humans might have sexes. "There is much I would like to know," he said. The human did not answer. "Can you fly? How do you disappear? How can you make what you want out of the air?"

The human's thoughts were amused. "We can do none of those things," she said. "Do you wasps believe that we can? Maybe I shouldn't give our weaknesses away."

"We generally do not even believe in the existence of humans," said Jeken. "You are stories we tell the young when they leave the white cocoon-covered cells. Humans live in trees and watch for lazy young wasps. I never worked, though, and I was never carried away. I was always disappointed. If we see a human we believe that we can demand anything we desire."

"I'm sorry," said the human.

"You're supposed to be crafty. That's a good trick, telling me that you have no powers. I don't want anything, anyway, not even to be a fertile female."

Rhennel laughed. "I really can't give you anything. I'm not magic."

"Sometimes the younger adults

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will go out at dusk to look for humans, but no one's ever seen one but me."

"And none of our people have ever spoken with a wasp. I suppose we're special. What's it like to be a wasp?"

Jeken was unable to answer. "There's a lot of work to do," he said at last. "I don't work, though. Some of us would rather watch the sky and think."

"We have people like that, too, but they don't admit it to others. Life is too hard."

"Can you tell me why?" asked Jeken quietly. "Humans must see things that we can't. Suddenly I don't like anything, and there's nowhere else to go. Why are we here? What are we supposed to be doing?"

"I told you that I'm not magic," said Rhennel, staring down toward the forest. "I don't know the answers, although I went through the same questions myself a few years ago." She paused, turning to face Jeken. She took a deep breath and spoke again. "Humans came to your world about three hundred years ago. The first explorers, our ancestors, were attacked by an army of wasps and nearly wiped out. Now there are a few hundred of us, living in family groups and tribes, scattered across this great plain, hiding from you and the fate of our fathers. Our life is harder than yours. We're on a world never meant for us. We are only slowly learning our way around. We have no friends and many enemies. We're not magic."

Jeken discovered a great bitterness in Rhennel's mind, a feeling that he could not understand. She was blocking her thoughts with more skill than during their first meeting, but the wasp could still feel the strength of her hate. The life cycle of the giant insects was far too short to allow them the luxury of history, so Jeken had to interpret Rhennel's emotions as a personal anger. There was too much that he just had never seen before and, frustrated, he opened his mind further to let the whole world and all its clues flood in.

He learned nothing except that many other human minds were nearby. He felt a strange excitement. Jeken was so lost among his new ideas that he never considered that Rhennel might be telling the truth, that the humans had no secret answer to his new despair. Factors conspired to bury him further in gloom: how could he quiet the human's hate long enough to make her understand his confusion? How could he voice his new-found brotherhood with all creatures?

"There are other humans near," he said.

"Yes," said Rhennel. "They were interested when I told of our meeting."

"My brothers and sisters would not believe me," said Jeken.

"We have all seen wasps before," said the human. Jeken felt her bitterness grow stronger. The

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minds of the other humans were as cloudy as hers had been the first time. He saw only hate, and they would not stop to hear.

"I will not understand," said Jeken. "I have no bad feelings at all. I cannot see why you fear me."

"We've had three hundred years to perfect it," said the human sharply, turning away quickly and running down the hill. As she fled, her companions protected her, leaving the edge of the forest and running up the hill toward Jeken. When they got close enough they began to throw hard, unripened fruits and shot arrows from bows strung with plant fibers. For a few moments Jeken was paralyzed with confusion. He was not enraged by the attack, but he still could not comprehend the reasons of the humans. Their tiny projectiles bounced harmlessly from his stiff tergal plates.

The humans ran nearer. Some of their arrows lodged painfully in the cracks between his armored sections. One foolish human, his thoughts screaming incoherent fury, raced ahead of his fellows and tried to hack at Jeken's face with a stone implement. Jeken was annoyed; he grasped the man with his two central legs and flew into the air. The man was badly injured, but still struck at Jeken's hard facial plates with his axe. The wasp held the man with his legs and mandibles, and curled his back around in an instinctive attempt to sting and paralyze him. As a male, of course, Jeken had no sting; but not realizing the fragile nature of the creature Jeken unknowingly crushed out its life with his strong jaws. He dropped the corpse to the grass-covered hill and swooped up in search of the way home.

Jeken arced around the hill, climbing higher into the air. He could still hear the humans' thought-cries, but by now Rhennel had run far away. He could not see her. Jeken caught the blurred green cue of the forest and stopped his spiral in the direction of the city. The blue of the hill merged with the brown of the plain beneath him. In a short while he passed the moundgate, but he did not turn along the perimeter. He flew straight over the giant nest, over the paper cells and the mud walls; he felt sadness, a rare feeling, and he wanted to fly as far as he could into the great surrounding plain.

The thickness of the city's noises overwhelmed him. He had not closed his mind in anticipation of the teeming shrillness, and he found it surprisingly comforting. The devotion to labor was something that he could understand, if not value. He felt a sudden need to immerse himself among his brothers, to hide his strange wounds beneath a mindless instinctive drive.

He landed near a forager returned from the plain with a small mammal, its jaws hanging open in

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paralysis. The forager held the animal tightly with its mouth parts, and three other wasps were tearing it apart. Jeken joined the small group and took a bit of the food. "Come with us," said one of the workers. Jeken followed the others into a paper-covered nursery. Most of the cells were filled with immature eggs, one cemented to a wall of each cell; but some contained translucent white larva, immobile and dependent on the adults for good. The workers travelled among them, stopping at the mouth of a cell housing a hungry grub. A worker signalled its presence by knocking its head against the edge of the cell; the larva responded by stretching its smooth white body and lifting its mouth beyond the edge.

When he saw the blind, yearning head of a larva, Jeken chewed a piece of the dead animal to a bland pulp and forced it against the larva's mouthparts. After eating, the larva spit up a clear drop of fluid, which Jeken carefully collected. He moved down the row of cells, giving each hungry larva a portion of masticated food and drinking a drop of saliva. In this way he quenched his own body's enzyme hunger for a few weeks, and in a small way relieved the workers of their load of labor.

Jeken was calmed by the work. He felt a minimal appreciation of the pervasive and warming cooperation that the others must know. All through his youth he was alienated, separated from his brothers by his unwillingness to surrender his identity; but only in the last few days had he become aware of the magnitude of his problem. He had always questioned the basic drives of his community's life, and reveled in his disrespect. But now he voiced doubts even he could see were pointless.

It was late afternoon when Jeken left the tunnels of the nursery. He walked restlessly about the city-nest, his wounds beginning to ache. He was greeted by Retet, another wasp cursed with an active mind.

"Jeken. Your work," he said.

"Yours, Retet. Have I told you about my humans?" Retet made no reply, and Jeken briefly gave him the history of his experiences. Jeken saw the tinge of skepticism on his friend's interested thoughts, but the only proof that he could offer was the black crust of blood on his forelegs and head.

"What did you do to provoke them?" asked Retet.

"I did nothing," said Jeken. "They are strange creatures. They appear and vanish again into the air. Naturally, they are as changeable as air, wind, clouds. They will be difficult to understand, but they are beautiful."

"Humans!" said Retet scornfully. "Good humans to watch over us while we sleep in the cocoon. Bad humans to carry us off

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when we're lazy. I'm too old for that."

"They fear us, Retet. Let us take them a gift of honeypaper." The two wasps talked for several minutes more, finally deciding to ask a few others of their outcast group to join them. Retet and the others were amused and completely without seriousness, but Jeken was determined to hunt down his answers.

Although it was already late in the day, and the foraging females had made their last trip of the afternoon, Jeken urged that the small party leave as soon as possible. Perhaps the humans were still waiting on the hill, or hiding in the near margin of the forest. Being smaller, and with slighter minds, the humans would have to be courted from their timidity. The gifts of honeypaper would help, but the wasps would have to be cautious.

Jeken led his three friends to the refectory. Each of them cut a large piece of the sweet, brittle honeypaper from the hanging stores, carrying it clumsily in his forelegs. They followed Jeken in single file through the tunnels and out into the twilight coolness. None of them addressed thoughts to him, but Jeken was aware that they were beginning to feel foolish.

They rose silently into the air, looking like an ominous squadron of raiders departing on a mission. One by one they flew up and circled the next, following the guides of the city walls below. They flew over gray-brown mounds, over the dun-colored plain, to the high blue lawn of the hill. One by one they hovered and came to rest, quietly, on the grass above their city. They still held the honeypaper chunks tightly, and they still said nothing to Jeken. They watched the empty forest and they waited. The twilight deepened and night fell, and all four wasps experienced the oddly pleasant coma of the cold.

In the morning they awakened, and Jeken's companions discussed their sleep excitedly. Their talk of death surprised Jeken; but the others had not explored the questions that had so troubled him lately, and their talk was just as idle to him as the thoughtless activity of the workers. He turned his mind from their chatter and discovered that a human was watching them from the forest, at the very limit of his perception. It was Rhennel.

"Rhennel?" he called. "Come, little human. I have questions still. I have food for you. Do not be afraid. Come, Rhennel. I have questions."

"Wasp, leave us alone," she said faintly in his mind.

"I have questions. Humans have answers. Come."

"We have no answers yet, wasp. We have no magic, only arrows. I will come. Yesterday I came so that you might be taken by my brothers. I was a spy,

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wasp, a trap. I will come today. I came yesterday and you were nearly killed. I will come today."

"Why, Rhennel? We are strangers. Let us learn; why don't you trust us?"

Rhennel climbed the hill toward the four wasps. Her thoughts were not masked, and the huge insects winced at the strength of her malice.

"Come, Jeken," said one of the others, "let us go home. Perhaps that is a human, but whatever it is I don't like it."

"I have questions," said Jeken impatiently.

"I have questions, too," said Retet, "but none worth the wounding."

"Go work, go die," said Jeken angrily. "Come, Rhennel, teach me."

"Fly me away from here, wasp," said the human. "My husband was killed yesterday. I will find another. Fly me over the plain to another forest." Rhennel came up to the trembling Jeken, ignoring the others. She climbed his barbed leg and sat imperiously on his thoracic plate.

"I have honeypaper for you, Rhennel. I have questions."

"Fly me away from here, wasp," she said.

Jeken flew slowly into the cool wind from the plain. It was difficult flying with the weight of the human, but he was excited, too, to learn his vague answers. The other three wasps watched silently, then followed him for a while. At last they parted company, the three returning to the city and Jeken and the human heading out over the motionless plain.

"What are you?" asked Jeken. "What are we? Why are we born? Why do we bother?"

"Those are stupid questions, wasp. They waste your time. Learn to enjoy your life, before we take it from you."

"Our lives are so short. We have nothing to enjoy, except what a few of us have discovered."

"That is good, wasp, because when we have wiped you out we will have destroyed a cipher."

"Destroy? There are hundreds of us in our city."

"Nearly a thousand and a half. But I do not mean your city, wasp. I mean your race. There are thousands of wasp nests on your planet. There are millions of you, and but a few hundred of us. But someday we will kill every one of you. For three hundred years we have kept ourselves alive for that one purpose. Not now, not next generation, not one hundred years from now, but someday we will rid this wasp world of our enemies."

"Why? asked Jeken, not understanding at all the fierce determination in Rhennel's mind.

"Your stings we use for spears. We tip our arrows with the poison. We use your plates for armor. If you think we can be taken lightly, busy yourself with

(continued on page 69)

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Herewith a brief cautionary tale for aspiring authors. . .

PRESENT PERFECT

THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

WILLIAM RUTHERFORD sat in his den, lit a cigarette, and opened another manila envelope. He pulled out the self-addressed-stamped-envelope, threw it on the desk, and looked at the manuscript that was included with it. He smiled as he saw the familiar slush pile title:

Paradise Lost
by
Rudolph Muir

Taking a drag on his cigarette, Rutherford read the first three paragraphs, figured out the entire story, and turned to the last page to read:

The smoldering wreckage of the once-gleaming starship lay in a twisted pile deep within a lush jungle. The man struggled to his feet and wandered away from it sweating profusely. Several agonizing minutes passed while he imagined that everyone else in the colony ship had been killed by the crash. Suddenly he saw movement within the twisted metal. A hand! Someone was climbing out! The man rushed up to the hand and pulled it out and was suprised to see that it was connected to a beautiful blonde.

"Oh, thank you," she said, pulling her torn jumpsuit up over her swollen breasts.

"That's all right," he said. Then, after a pregnant pause, he added: "I guess we're the only ones left."

The blonde cast a furtive glance about the hostile environs and nodded nervously.

He looked at her appreciatively, smiled and said: "By the way, what's your name?"

She looked up at him and a little smile danced upon her full lips. "Eve," she said.

RUTHERFORD STAMPED OUT his cigarette and reached for another rejection slip. *Not another one. Won't these guys ever learn?* He checked off one of the most frequently used parts of the slip (the one which said: "—To you this may seem original, but to our readers this story is old hat.") and placed it with the manuscript in the self-addressed-stamped-envelope for its safe return to the author.

As he was reaching for another manuscript, his wife entered the den with some coffee. "How's it going, honey?" she asked.

"Ah, it's the same old shit," said Rutherford. "Thanks," he said, taking the coffee and lighting

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another cigarette. His wife nodded knowingly. William had been reading the unsolicited manuscripts of *Incredible Science Fiction Magazine* for many years and he had seen most of the famous themes of the genré methodically beaten to death by the hordes of slush pile authors. Looking at his watch, he saw that he had time to read a few more submissions before the President came on television for another one of his numerous nation-wide proclamations. It had been a long day and Rutherford was looking forward to the Presidential telecast. A little humor always relaxed him.

While his wife sat on the couch reading a historical novel, Rutherford extracted another manuscript and began reading:

All Quiet On The Earthly Front
by
B. Preston Wilde

Several hours after the last terrible explosions wracked the earth, Garth slowly scrambled up the mile long passage of the abandoned mine. When he reached the surface, the sky was stained scarlet and punctuated by myriad mushroom clouds. Fear exploded in his brain and he thought: "Oh God! They've finally done it!"

After getting over the initial shock, Garth headed back to what had once been civilization; but try as he might, he could not find anyone else alive. He began to wonder why the the radiation had not killed him. Perhaps he was immune. . .

I wish I was immune to these kinds of stories, thought Rutherford, as he flipped through the manuscript to the last page. Just as he had expected, Garth wasn't really the Last Man On Earth after all—it was just an experiment being carried out by mad social scientists.

He picked up another rejection slip and checked off the appropriate space. This time he had a number of applicable comments but he chose the one which read: "—Stories which depend on surprise endings are rarely surprising, and even more rarely are they good stories." Placing the manuscript and slip into its return envelope, Rutherford mused, as he had done many times before, on the amazing frequency of similar stories in the slush pile. It seemed like many nights of manuscript reading were almost exactly alike.

What the hell, he thought as he picked up another manila envelope. Pulling out the manuscript, which was crinkled and bent and marked from numerous paper-clippings, mailings, etc., he read the title:

I Always Thought Raymond Was Kind Of Strange
by
John Harrington Trail

The sleepy little town of Unionville was never the same after Old

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Man Barker claimed he saw a flying saucer down by Potter's Mill. After that, everybody was seeing them. At first I didn't make any connection between them and what was taking place in my personal life. That happened later.

It all started when this new scientist, Raymond Garubendi, started working at the Electronics Lab where I worked just outside of Unionville. Raymond wasn't a very talkative sort and he had the odd habit of always. . .

RUTHERFORD closed the manuscript without even bothering to go on to the last page. Once again, the creaky Alien-Among-Us theme had been wheeled onto the stage for another feeble performance. Shaking his head, while he filled out another rejection slip (this time he checked both of the abovementioned categories), he muttered one word: "Shit."

"Not so good?" said his wife, who also familiar with the ritual which was performed in the den each night.

"I don't know why it bothers me sometimes," said Rutherford, as he attached the green slip to the manuscript and shoved the whole package back into the manila envelope. "These young writers who keep sending us this old stuff. Either they all read the same anthologies when they were kids, or they've all gotten together and they're just changing the name under the byline each time I reject it."

His wife laughed weakly. "Maybe it's just *deja vu*?"

Rutherford considered her half-hearted comment. There was even something about the way she said that line that was disturbingly familiar. It was as if he knew she was going to say it. *Deja vu of a deja vu,* he thought. *That would be wild.*

Putting it out of his mind, he lit another cigarette and checked his watch. He had time for one more story that night before the President's comedy hour. Considering the way the slush had been going that night, he wondered, as he pulled out the manuscript, how many times he had read this one before. Just to make sure, he gathered up one more green rejection slip and read the following:

Present Perfect
by
Thomas F. Monteleone

William Rutherford sat in his den, lit a cigarette, and opened another manila envelope. . .

—THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

SPECIAL FOR CONAN READERS

Three issues of FANTASTIC containing the following CONAN STORIES: THE WITCH OF THE MISTS, BLACK SPHINX OF NEBTHU, and RED MOON OF ZEMBABWEI by L. Sprague de Camp & Lin Carter. Three for $2.00; 75¢ each.

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BARRY N. MALZBERG

Barry Malzberg's Horovit's World *has been called "Brilliant!" It tells the story of a hack science fiction writer with insight and despair. Here, in 3,500 words, Malzberg tells a tale about another hack writer: a man who has much to tell. . .*

HANGING

Illustrated by GRAY MORROW

TO COME STRAIGHT to the point, I am the man who invents the clichés, catch-phrases and aphorisms of your time. Yes, although it may sound highly unlikely, all of these emanate from these deft hands, this twinkling brain, this small furnished room, ditto those figures of speech which you hear from disc jockeys and television personalities, perhaps as recently as last night. FREAK OUT, TOUGH SHIT, HANGING LOOSE. UPTIGHT. SLIP ME SOME SKIN, TELL IT TO THE MAN, COOL IT. GET IT ON. All of them had their origin in this bullet-shaped head, likewise these fingers that poured out the words to clean paper and then, via the Distributors, to the world.

You didn't think these things came about spontaneously, did you? Even the universe had an origin. BANG. TOUGH BANANAS. SIXTY-NINE. How did I get into this business?

Looking back on it, this is hard to say. Unable to settle on my life's work in the late teens like most people of our generation, I must have simply fallen into it. The pay is good and the job is necessary, God knows. There are worse careers.

Yet it is difficult, difficult to be responsible for all the clichés of the world, that medium through which our reality actually moves. Also, this has had a ponderous and rather soporific effect upon my own rhetoric which swings casually between my instincts and trade, my narration thus mediating uneasily between passages of the most shocking insight and moments which fail to come alive, due to inevitable hackneying. Nevertheless, I must get all of this out as best I can; my confessions are no less interesting than any actor's and I will keep a cool and cunning hand upon the second serial rights. This time.

Here I am: the day's completed work before me. Twenty-five phrases and figures of speech which will slowly descend into the

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public consciousness until they emerge on July 7, 1977. I must work several years ahead like a good comic strip plotter to guard against illness or sudden death. WINKING OUT THE BORDER. LILYDARK. MARS MAZE. I am paid four cents a word for my efforts on acceptance, for all rights. Several years ago, I secured an agent who attempted to retain some of the performing rights and to grant me some kind of royalty arrangement based on use but my employers became very ugly and threatened to terminate my services. I was forced to release this agent, who had only been trying to do his job, but as a result of this failure, I am given to understand, he became severely depressed and confidence shattered was out of the markets within a year. He is now in manufacturing although I cannot obtain more specific information.

Four cents a word is not enormous but on a good day I can generate eight to ten typewritten pages, each averaging two hundred words (today has been a slender day) which means that my gross pay before deductions is somewhere between sixty and eighty dollars a day or, perhaps, seventeen thousand a year. This is not inadequate really for my purposes. I live simply, have no hobbies, have a horror of relationships of any sort, and although I have been at this job for five years now without any significant raises or promise of advance I am

HANGING

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not discontent. It was understood from the beginning that this job was a dead end; there is, after all, very little place in the world for my highly specialized skills and in any event, I could hardly declare them on a resume. Interviewers would not believe me. *You* do not believe me. . .do you? LAY IT ON ME.

It is five in the afternoon; the day's work has been done for half an hour and so I have been filling in time awaiting the arrival of the messenger, idly typing these notes. Now the messenger comes, a few moments late as usual, skipping through the open door and standing rather humbly before me. On the other side of the desk as always, he waits to receive the copy.

The messenger is my only contact with the distributors whom I have never met. All of my dealings with them have been through intermediaries. In the course of my agent's negotiations to which I referred, I received a rather hysterical phone call from a woman who said that she was a secretary and that one of the distributors would be down to fire me personally if I did not desist from my demands, but this is as close as I have come to personal contact. I got the job by answering a small classified, box number included, in the local newspaper, since you ask.

"All done?" the messenger says. He always says this; it is our ritual. Sometimes I think that he is as compulsive as I. My work is always ready for him; there has never been a time when the pages, neatly polished (I still do second drafts although my facility has reached the point where they are necessary only for conscientiousness) were not on the far side of the desk, awaiting pickup. "I see you are."

"I'm always done. I love my work." This too is part of the ritual.

"That's important," the messenger says, "very important." He is a small man, early thirties, perhaps as young as twenty-five or so although intensely nervous. He has his own responsibilities and the pay, merely to vet and fetch copy cannot be too good. He looks through the pages quickly.

"Mars Maze," he says, "would you please explain that one?"

"By July 7, 1977, there will be renewed interest in a Mars expedition, with the change of administrations and the bottoming-out of the aerospce industry. Extended probes of Mars will have indicated a soft terrain and an accomodating atmospheric situation making a landing feasible by no later than 1982. On the other hand, reformist and libertarian elements will persist in their loathing of the program and will need a catch phrase to symbolize their feelings. Also, by inference, the phrase will refer to all situations which seem indeterminate or manipulative.

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"It will even have a sexual connotation," I add wickedly, causing the messenger to jump. All sexual references make him uneasy which is strange considering that they are involved in such a high proportion of the work.

"I think that that's probably a bit specious," the messenger says. This part is routine; he will quibble over one or two phrases daily, whether from honest doubt or from the rigors of his position I cannot say. I know that he does not have the right of final approval, although his recommendations are probably important. "We have no assurance that the matter of a Mars expedition will be in the popular consciousness at that time."

"The phrase will plant that consciousness," I say, "create and define it," which is absolutely true and unanswerable. I know this work. The messenger nods and folds over my copy, places the sheets in the small knapsack which he has strung over his left shoulder.

"All right," he says, "I'll take it up with them and give your point of view on this. Is everything all right otherwise?"

"Yes," I say, and add just to make conversation "there's a small likelihood that I might have to find new quarters sometime next year. The landlord says that urban renewal is poking around. But that hardly affects my professional life and anyway, I'm sure it will take a while." This is as close as I can come to yielding informal personal information; as I have implied, I have no private life.

"Good," he says, "good." He nods. Now it is the time for him to move away but strangely he does not. Instead he removes a package of cigarettes from his knapsack and lights one uncomfortably, flicking the match into a disheveled corner of the room and then inhaling and exhaling in large, scattered puffs.

"There's just one other thing, though," he says, looking past my shoulders. "I don't quite know how to put this. Something came up."

"What?" I say, "tell me." It is disconcerting to have ritual broken in this way. I am a man of small habits, great order, defined activities through which I block out my life and which make the work possible. If I were not so ordered, I am sure that I would have long since found my life and work untenable. "Tell me."

"Yeah," the messenger says, "yeah, I'm going to get to that." He grinds out the cigarette, looks from corner to corner of the room, and then, putting his hands on hips, confronts me straight on. "I have to tell you that you're going to be laid off for a time. They think that you're so far ahead now that the stuff might kind of, uh, lose touch if we don't wait it out. They're thinking in terms of a year or two, until some of the inventory gets used up. They say they're having trouble

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coordinating the stuff already."

"You mean that I'm being fired?"

"Well no," he says. He seems very uncomfortable, backs off, leans against the open door, "not really that, because they don't mean to replace you. There's no need to replace you because the work's caught up ahead for so many years. What it would be is a layoff by mutual agreement and in a year or two, you could, uh, reapply and probably get preference."

He nudges the door even further ajar with a toe, steps delicately into the hall. "I mean, it isn't my decision you understand," he says, "I just kind of run this stuff back and forth, that's all, give my ideas on the copy. I don't have anything to do with management. But they think that this would be best because the stuff is, ah, kind of getting so far ahead that it might lose touch and not coordinate too well with things and you got to consider my position. Think about me. I could get laid off too, just as easy, I do other stuff for them but this is the primary job and if they cut this off, they may be able to shift things around and let me go. It's a question of cutting down the payroll.

"You see, they say that like everybody else they're a little overextended and have to make some adjustments," he says, now becoming voluble. "I don't mind saying that I think you're getting a real screwing on this deal after the way you took it on your own hook to build them up an inventory, but that's the way it is. It isn't my decision. I had no business getting in with them in the first place; I just needed some kind of job until I could get back to school and got hooked in. Maybe it's all for the best: with your talent you should be a writer anyway. A real writer doing real stuff."

"When does this layoff start?"

The messenger looks at the floor, puts his right hand on the knapsack, adjusts it. "Sort of today," he says quietly, "I mean tomorrow. Today is the last day. They'll mail you your check right up to today and probably pay you through the end of the week although I can't be sure. They don't tell me anything. You know," he says confidentially, I cannot shut him up, "sometimes I got the feeling that we got absolutely no control over what's going on here. That even they don't know what's going on, but I figure that that's not my problem," and then he leaves, closing the door quickly. I sit at my desk over the typewriter, facing the door, waiting for the messenger to return and say more but he does not and after a time I realize that we will never see each other again.

And it is only a short while after that when I come to accept the fact that I will never see my job as well either and that is the most dismaying thing of all. But years of working in terms of

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aphorism enable me to control my feelings. STICK IT IN. TOUCH IT OUT. HARD-NOSED MAKE THE ROUNDS.

"They cannot do this to me," I say to the empty spaces of the room, "now they cannot abuse my skill and experience in this way." Mad thoughts of going into the business for myself afflict me but I realize immediately that I lack the distribution sources and would not know where to begin.

And then it occurs to me. I realize how I can solve the problem and deal with the distributors both. This is only a brief of my situation; I have much more to divulge plus thousands of my writings which for some reason did not make it into the common language. The tools for the analysis are there; it will be fascinating for the ethnologists to decide why some phrases become current and others did not. This is only the beginning of what I could tell. A brief if you will.

For contract and advance, I will tell everything.

HANGING.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

Poets and Humans (continued from page 60)

your childish questions. You have forgotten the crimes of your fathers, but we cannot." The human said little more as the day passed. Jeken flew across the endless ocean of the prairie, into territory unknown to any of his city. He was about to complain of exhaustion, when the human indicated a stand of low trees on the horizon, behind which the sun was already setting.

"Let me down here, wasp," said Rhennel when they had come closer, "and I will walk to the forest. If you come nearer you will be killed." Jeken landed on the plain, and the human jumped to the ground and walked quickly away.

"Rhennel!" called Jeken, his thoughts churning, his mind alternating between fear and grief. "What should I do?"

The human continued walking, never turning around to face him. Her answer came faintly in his consciousness: "Die, wasp, all of you. You'd better fly home before my brothers find you." Jeken stared after her for a while. When at last he beat his wings the dusky breeze was already turning colder, and before he had flown a hundred yards he felt the peculiar night-time numbness stealing over his body.

—GEO. ALEC EFFINGER

ON SALE NOW IN AUGUST AMAZING The first part of THE DOMAINS OF KORYPHON, JACK VANCE'S greatest new novel, plus new stories by ROBERT THURSTON, ROBERT F. YOUNG, TED WHITE, and CALVIN DEMMON; plus new features by GREGORY BENFORD and BRIAN M. STABLEFORD.

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fantasy books

reviewed by Fritz Leiber

NO LONGER ON THE MAP, by Raymond H. Ramsay, Viking, 1972, $10.95 (Ballantine, 1973, $1.05)

What's the difference between New Granada, El Dorado, and Atlantis?

The first was the actual name of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and part of Brazil in the days of the Spanish Empire.

The second was a golden kingdom in South America, now known never to have existed, but which once was believed in to such a degree that it was put on old maps.

The third was a fabulous land referred to by Plato, but never believe in to the point where it was put on maps, until present-day cultists and partisans began to do so.

It is with the second sort of geographical names that this very interesting book is concerned: the Isle of Satanaxio and other Devil's Islands, the elusive Northwest Passage, the Seven Cities and not just of Cibola, Grocland, mysterious Mayda, and Norumbega. Some appear on the earliest classical maps; others have perversely persisted almost to today, such as the dubious Thompson Island (near lonely Bouvet) which nevertheless appeared on a widely circulated world map as recently as 1954.

Most interesting of all, to me, is the long chapter on Terra Australia, the long-sought vast southern continent believed to balance the northern land masses of the world—quite unrelated to the smaller, actual Antarctica undiscovered until modern times. Partly because of the titanic work Captain James Cook, that supreme navigator, did to disprove it. Partly because as recently as 1845 Poe used it in his sea novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* which Lovecraft in turn drew on for *At the Mountains of Madness.*

The book has about eighty fine illustrations, half of them maps, some of which inevitably suffer by the reduction in size necessary in the paperback edition.

Ernest S. Dodge, Director of

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the Peabody Museum at Salem, Mass., says, "Ramsay has brought together information that nowhere else can be found between two covers in literature."

COOKING OUT OF THIS WORLD, edited by Anne McCaffrey, Very Original $1.50, Ballantine Books, 1973.

"Martini."

"Oh sure. The pink or the blue?"

Ever since that dialogue in Fred Brown's *What Mad Universe* pulverized the supremacy of the dismal food-pill diet of early science-fiction, its authors have been giving us a banquet of future and extraterrestrial foods —Martian *zot á la Marseilles*, baked baby gregarian, *gallina de luna*, etc. So why shouldn't 33 of them tell us about their cooking away from the typewriter?

The recipes vary from Tony Boucher's Curry de Luxe ("Grind the whole spices in a mortar") and John Brunner's Eggy Mess ("Beat the eggs as though they'd done you an injury") to Joe F. Pumilia's Tortilla Saucer (Canned Spanish rice on a scorched one. "If fastidious, you can beat the rice") and Larry Niven's Busted Kneecap (Bourbon a-bubble, a-smoke, and a-chill with dry ice). Dishes that are far out in several directions, but most of them tasty sounding and some truly mouth watering, such as H. H. Hollis' *Mancha Manteles*.

$1.50 sounds like a Very Original price to me, but then I'm always dreaming like a fool about what I paid for paperbacks fresh off the stand in the 1940's.

However, I really wrote this review to take to task the bonehead fish-stew author ("Flavor with curry, just enough to kill the fish taste") who sanctimoniously accuses the Hawaiians of eating dolphin in their *mahi-mahi*. Doesn't the dummy know the creature involved is *not* our bright talkative fellow mammal *Delphinus delphi* but the toothsome spiny finned pelagic fish *Coryphaena*, which expires in rainbow hues but is otherwise quiet? You'd think a *science-fiction* writer would check.

The culprit? Echo answers woefully from behind my typewriter, "Nobody here, boss, but we dolphins."

NEW FANTASY FILMS

The chief impression *Zardoz* left me with was that, consciously or not, it duplicated the general design of *2001*, as if the latter film had set down a four-part pattern which all subsequent serious science-fiction films might profitably follow.

The four parts are the quickening subhumans, the doomed utopia, the psychedelic trip, and the frightening encounter with time.

Instead of *2001*'s desert apes

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stimulated by a singing slab to discover the thigh-bone weapon, we have in *Zardoz* brutalized humans admonished and given guns by a huge stone head watchfully afloat within bellowing distance of the ground—very much like the ruling loadstone island of Laputa in Gulliver's third voyage (while the brutalized humans are the Yahoos of his fourth).

Corresponding to luxury spaceflight and a moon-Hilton in the former, both glories of a near-future unknowingly doomed by discovery of a second slab, there is in the latter a small utopia of brilliant millionaire scholars who had sealed themselves off from a world laid waste by war and pollution. Into that refuge of immortals comes Zed, an exterminator from the wastelands and ultimately a figure of universal death (and rebirth).

In *2001* the psychedelic trip is an abstract color show giving the impression of change at dizzying velocity. In the new film the trip breaks down into two parts: the education of Zed by the visually entrancing process of skin-teaching, wherein works of art and scientific diagrams and formulas are projected on the bodies of beautiful women; and a room-of-mirrors journey into the heart of a crystal that is an atomic-level computer and memory bank.

As for part four, instead of the protagonist aging to death in seconds, followed by the appearance of a gigantic, mystically dreaming embryo, we have a similarly telescoped vision of Zed and his surviving mate producing a child who drifts off to his destiny when he matures, while his parents age to white-haired skeletons. (In *Gulliver's Travels* there is the chilling chapter about the Struldbruggs, in which the heaven of everlasting youth and growth is replaced by the hell of unending decrepitude and senility. In spite of its harsh criticism of natural philosophers, *Gulliver* is the seminal work of science-fiction in English literature, just as Webster's drama *The Duchess of Malfi* is the parent of the Gothic novel.)

I think there will be more films following the *2001* formula and that this will be a good thing.

It's a *rich* formula. It follows a natural birth-growth-conflict-death and transfiguration line. Seemingly any one of the four parts is alone enough formula for a film of sorts. The "Planet of the Apes" films have made out after a fashion with just the quickening-subhumans part. Incidentally, the distance shots in *Zardoz* of exterminators on horseback with Zeus-masks and rifles shooting down wastelanders are strikingly like those views of mounted apes herding or hunting humans. While all too many *Star Trek* shows have seen Captain Kirk under the quack-humanistic egging of Dr. McCoy destroying all sorts of utopias created by computers and other advanced intel-

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ligences ("Bones, man was not meant for paradise")—with Mr. Spock (Bless him!) dissenting or at least highly dubious about the whole business.

Inevitably, most films will follow formulas. Ninety percent of them are attempts to duplicate past box-office successes. Look how it went with post-war science fiction. We had some promising one-shots: *The Day the Earth Stood Still, Five, Destination Moon, Forbidden Planet.* Then came *The Thing,* that travesty of Campbell's *Who Goes There?,* with its formula of The Monster is Loose! taken straight from the horror films imitating *Kong* and *Frankenstein*, and there began a worldwide plague of similars, reaching its most epidemic proportions, perhaps, and certainly its quaintest form in Japan.

A rich formula giving scope for the imagination is better than an impoverished and narrow one. It seems to me as simple as that.

Zardoz kept me watching the screen, but it hardly ever gripped me for a moment. It had going for it:

Lovely landscapes of green domed hills, delicate copses, narrow old roads, and dreamy villages. Filmed in Ireland, which had a year earlier provided the hauntingly eerie, lovely outdoor backgrounds in Altman's *Images.* John Boorman, the writer-producer-director, had just spent a year scripting *The Lord of the Rings* (too costly for the studios, so far), for which the Irish background would be ideal, and *Zardoz* profits from it.

Some astonishingly beautiful sexual photography (the female body adazzle with sunlight, a bare-breasted woman moving on horse-back and seen through foliage) that make one wonder just how the hardcore films keep managing to miss it (with the exception of *Green Door*).

Convincing moments here and there, as when a ring of utopians go into group trance and almost convince one that, as in Stapleton's *Last and First Men,* a single higher self rather than lowest-common-denominator-mob-mind has taken over.

The (dubious, really) bonus humor of the gun-and-phallos embodiment Zed being portrayed by Sean Connery, James Bond archetype.

What the film lacks is convincingly visualized science and science gadgets. For isntance, the program explains, "If, by accident, an Eternal is killed he can be reconstructed complete with all memories and experiences intact." Very interesting and suggestive, *but* it cannot help the film a bit unless it is shown happening step by step so well that we are strongly tempted to believe it. This is not done.

We are shown reconstructed naked human bodies awaiting experience implants. They are wrapped in what looks exactly like cloudy pliofilm.

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We are told of the invisible wall sealing off the utopian commune. On screen it is simulated by a face pressed against plate glass and later, completely unconvincingly, by more pliofilm.

The crystal into the heart of which Zed finally plunges is shown as a pyramid made of mirror glass and looking exactly that.

Despite many beautiful shots, there is nothing like *2001's* marvelous illusions of free fall in the shuttlecraft (the stewardess with magnetic boots), of a spacecraft docking, and of gravity simulated by centrifugal force.

I conclude from this that *Zardoz* suffers somewhat from its tight budget (several millions, but still not big enough) but chiefly from the absence of a controlling science-fiction and science mind equivalent to that of Arthur C. Clarke.

Rhinoceros made me think of the sheer age of some fantasy ideas. Surely picturing heshe as animals goes as far back into prehistory as any other. (Heshe is my new non-chauvinist plural word for men and/or women; eh is the singular, meaning a woman or a man.) One thinks of primitive clans with animal totems and of the animal-headed gods of ancient Egypt.

Such eldritch notions are forever being reborn—in cycles, I fancy. After World War II, I was haunted by the story-idea of a man who wakes one day to find his wife (later, everyone) turning by slow stages into an animal, but he is the only one to notice it. A strong idea, but I couldn't figure out what to do with it. Then Eugene Ionesco's play was produced and with a petulant sigh I quit thinking in that direction.

(Sometimes it is not another writer, but life itself which overtakes my snaily mind. At about the same time, I wrote the first four pages of a murky tale in which a man goes to all sorts of lengths to have the United Nations declare him a citizen of the world, but then Garry Davis up and really did it, and not at all murkily.)

Now the animal idea—and the theater of the absurd—have passed the peaks in their cycles and are troughing. Nevertheless, Tom O'Horgan does a good, if somewhat shouty job of turning the play into a film. Zero Mostel repeats his vivid job of spearheading heshe's transmogrification into rhinos, while Gene Wilder is quietly most effective as the last eh.

The TV *Wonder Woman*, premiering in an hour and a half, follows a delightful, remarkably finished and wholly admirable set of rules for translating a super-eh adventure comic to the screen:

Take everything seriously. The most hackneyed devices of melodrama, such as glass panels dropping to trap the hero, or murderous snakes emerging from tiny snake-doors (as in Conan Doyle's "The Speckled Band"), are quite

(continued on page 115)

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go to them.' Now everyone knows that the Gubbings worship Satan. Furthermore, they are—" He paused, he appeared to grope for a word.

"Bestial," said Nicholas' mother.

"Bestial. Beast men."

"But how can I help?"

"He doesn't get on with many of his parishioners, Puritan or otherwise." Herrick's church was Anglican, the only church in the parish, but several of its members were Puritans like Standish. The word "Puritan" was a vague and general term which included Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and practically everyone else who was not an Anglican or a Papist. Often, through necessity or wile, they remained within the framework of the Anglican Church, the Church of England, whose bishops held the ear of the King. Michael Standish was a Presbyterian Puritan; that is to say, he abhorred elaborate ritual and devoutly believed that God's grace, not good works, exalted a man to heaven, though he insisted that a man must lead an austere and prayerful life in order to deserve such grace. "But he likes you. I recall that he invited you to the Vicarage at Christmas and you came home reeking of ale." The mug which Nicholas had drained with Herrick had been no taller than a toadstool. "He will like you better since your accident. He has a foolish weakness for beggars and cripples. As if they were not predestined to such an end! Win his confidence. Whenever possible, join him, follow him, spy upon him. In short, implicate him. We will do the rest."

Nicholas' feelings about his vicar—he no longer allowed himself to think of him as Robin—were chaotic and contradictory. Surely his own accident was a punishment for liking the man; for using Herrick's apostasy as an excuse to carouse with George. Only last night he had dreamed his familiar dream about the maidens and the Maypole, but this time Herrick was with them, his lips twisted with sensual pleasure, his eyes glazed with drunkenness. And the maidens were no longer maidenly. They wore earrings of tarnished gold; they had painted their mouths; they resembled Chloe. Under their gowns he could imagine foxtails or feathers; *and he himself was with them along with Herrick.*

"He's at the Festival," his father continued, as if to confirm the dream. "You'll doubtless find him loading the hock cart. Or helping the maidens to load it. Go to him and *gain his trust.*"

Nicholas struggled to his feet; pain cut like a scythe through his broken leg. He lost a crutch and almost lost his footing. His mother rose from the bench to steady him. There was real concern in her pale, pinched features, her faded green eyes.

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Sometimes Nicholas wished that she would discard her white cap and free her dark red hair to catch the light. Once, unseen, he had watched her when she arose from bed in the morning and she had looked remarkably, almost unrecognizably young. But where other women heightened their beauty with combs and, in royal courts or Cambridge taverns, with paints, Esther Standish hurried to conceal her hair and grew more pale with the burdens of the day. A woman who exulted in the beauty of her hair, said Nicholas' father, might suffer Absalom's fate. Her pride would strangle her.

Standish restrained his wife with a hand which did not quite touch her sleeve. "The boy does not need help." Then, to Nicholas: "Sometimes the flesh is mortified for the enlightenment of the soul. Go now to the playground of the Devil and accomplish God's work."

"Yes, Father."

THE TOWN resembled a garden. Though the single lane was little more than a pig-trot, the stone houses, thatched with straw and lush with vines and flowers, looked as if they were grown instead of built, and the stone wall across the lane from the houses looked like an untrimmed hedge. Morning glory entwined with rose, blue flower with red or white, and sparrows bickered where in spring they had built their nests. When he was a little boy he had picked his mother a garland of roses from their own walls and she had smiled and hung it around her neck, but his father had come into the room and asked in his cool, even voice, "Are you going to church—or a May Dance?" She had blushed and removed the garland, and it had seemed to Nicholas that, from this moment, he and his parents were divided from the flower-walled house, the town, the earth; that they ought to have built their dwelling with dark stones from one of the cairns in Dartmoor. Strange that Robert Herrick, whose vicarage above the town was a riot of roses, a haunt of larks and nightingales, should visit Dartmoor for doubtful, perhaps devilish purposes.

He suppressed the joy which opened in him like a morning glory and hobbled along the lane between the houses and the wall to join the Harvest Home and gather evidence which could send a man to the stake.

The celebrated grimness of Devon lay in its jagged coastlines and its mist-haunted moors, not in its towns, and certainly not in the opulent fields immediately surrounding the village of Dean Church, one of the three such villages in Robert Herrick's parish of Dean Prior. The soil was red and rich, the cattle were red and fat, the wheat grew as tall as Goliath, and during the daylight, at least, one could almost forget the brack-

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ish airs which sometimes blew from Dartmoor to the northwest.

Drawn by frisking fillies, the hock cart moved through the fields like a little treasure galleon, its riches the richest wheat of the harvest. The girls wore yellow bonnets, the boys wore sprigs of wheat in their blacker-than-crow's-wing hair. The manes of the horses were twined with daisies. Someone was playing a flute, and everyone was singing,

Crown'd with the ears of corn, now come,
And, to the pipe, sing Harvest home. . . .
Some bless the cart; some kiss the sheaves;
Some prank them up with oaken leaves. . . .

Herrick himself was leading the procession; in fact, he had written the harvest song. The cart lurched to a halt at the edge of a stubbled field, which lay like the back of the sheep from which had been shorn the Golden Fleece. Some of the elders were tending fires and roasting slabs of beef, mutton, and veal over the open flames, or scooping custards into dishes on rough wooden tables; or handing tankards of beer into eager, empty hands. An aged farmer, flushed and ale-eloquent, was drinking a toast to a pile of scythes and sickles and addressing them as "my lovelies."

At the sight of Robert Herrick, radiant with song and almost as youthful looking as the younglings he led, Nicholas felt the full hatefulness of being a spy; he felt as if he had eaten a Destroying Angel mushroom. There was something of summer about the man: wheat-yellow hair which enwreathed his head and tumbled, uncombed and unscented, about his shoulders. Wheat sprays stuck in his collar. Sunlight which kindled the goldenness of him to a brighter gold. His face was ruddy from the hours he spent in the Vicarage garden. His eyes were as clear and blue as a Devon stream in the spring, when it carried melting snows to the sea. He wore a tunic and buskins like those which the young farmers had worn in Devonshire since the Middle Ages, but neither stockings nor sleeves, and the silken, sun-glittered hairs on his powerful arms and legs gave to him at once a ruggedness and a delicacy. He looked like a man who could speak Latin and swear like a coachman. He looked like a priest of Pan.

The song stopped; the young people scattered among the tables; and Herrick called his name.

"Nicholas, I didn't know you were back from Cambridge!"

Nicholas limped toward him.

The Vicar did not look surprised at the crutches. No doubt he had heard, with the rest of the town, about Nicholas' accident.

"Lean on me," he said. "I'll be your crutch. There's a bit of shade under that hawthorn tree."

"Thank you, Master Herrick,"

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Nicholas said when he was seated as comfortably as possible under the tree. He was never truly comfortable, however, and he could hardly distinguish between the ache in his leg, sometimes sharp, sometimes dull and smouldering, and the ache in his conscience, an organ which to a Puritan was as tangible as a lung or a rib and in fact was thought to lodge directly below the heart. "Now you must have some beer and beef. Everyone else is eating."

"We'll have some together."

They sat under the tree and divided a slab of ribs. Covertly Nicholas looked for signs of guilt—a furtive gesture, an air of secret depravity—but Herrick disarmed him with his blue, level gaze. "The fill-horse is eating too. See, they've unharnessed him and he's nibbling grain out of the Miller's hand."

"But the Miller's daughter—she isn't eating *or* feeding the horses. I think she's—"

"Tumbling in the hay with Scroop. You know what they say about Harvest Home. It begets more bastards than there are sprays of wheat in a hock cart."

"Oughtn't you to do something?"

"I will one day," said Herrick wistfully. "Marry them, I suppose."

A young girl strayed past them. Her sweat-damp gown, cut low in front to reveal the top of her breasts, clung to her body, as blatant an advertisement as the sign above the door to the Devil Inn. It was just such a girl who had prompted Nicholas' dreams about the Maypole. She nodded to Nicholas but reserved her smile for Herrick. Perhaps she hoped for an invitation to join them, or better, to replace Nicholas.

"Julia," Herrick said. "I see your friends are forming a Morris Dance. There's Jonathan dressed like Maid Marion." An old, unaccountable, but inflexible English tradition demanded that a boy should play Marion. The Moors had originated the dance; the English had appropriated and anglicized it as surely as Shakespeare had anglicized Greek myths and Roman history. "And see, George has stuck a feather in his cap. He must be Robin Hood. Why don't you join them? You could be the Queen of May."

"But it's August, and it isn't even the time of year for a Morris Dance."

"Never mind. Any time is right for a dance."

"Will you be the Lord of Misrule?" She gave a coquettish and, so it seemed to Nicholas, downright simpering smile.

"Perhaps when I've finished talking with my friend."

With a backward glare at Nicholas, she flounced across the field to join the dancers.

"I hear you're going to be apprenticed to your father."

"For seven years. One day I expect I'll take over his shop." He

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did not like to speak of the subject. He had never wanted to become a minister, but at least he had liked Cambridge. He certainly did not want to become his father's apprentice and spend the rest of his life mixing simples and measuring powders.

"It seems like drudgery, I know, dispensing all those powders and potions. But a good apothecary does much more. He learns to deliver babies as well as a mid-wife, and to set bones and, if he's really good, to treat the Plague. Speaking of broken bones, I'm sorry about your accident. You must miss Cambridge very much."

"I do, Master Herrick. I have a friend there I miss." Not for a moment had Nicholas blamed George for the accident with the carriage. "And my tutor and my rooms and—everything."

"I asked you to call me Robin. Have you forgotten?"

"No, I thought perhaps you had."

"Forget my friend who knows Catullus better than I do? You may have had to come back to Devon against your will, but I think we shall have some good times together. You shall teach me more about Catullus, and I shall teach you—what would you like to learn?"

Nicholas forgot to speak as a Puritan. "How to be a Morris dancer! How to catch a greased pig at a county fair! How to—" He looked down at his leg.

"About your leg," said Robin. "I think it's been badly set. I may be able to ease the pain. Will you come back with me—?" He did not have time to complete his invitation.

A cry resounded among the fields.

"A bear! A bear! Scobble has brought a bear!"

Bear-baiting was popular in London and even in Exeter, twenty miles to the north of Dean Church, but a bear in a small village was a rarity. Scobble, a loutish young fellow with as many warts as freckles, had dragged his animal across the field on a chain while prodding him with a shepherd's staff. Now he was chaining him to a hawthorn tree. The bear looked small, hungry, and unhappy; there was no chance of escape.

"George, Jonathan, Julia, Corinna, watch me bait him!"

George, Jonathan, Julia, Corinna, and most of their elders accepted the invitation. Meat began to scorch on the spits. Tankards of ale began to attract flies. One could always eat and drink or dance a Morris Dance. But a bear in little Dean Church—why, London had come to town!

Herrick followed the gathering with his eyes. Did he mean to join the crowd? Nicholas felt a moth of nausea, dusty-winged and fluttering, in his throat. Hunting was one thing. Every man and boy in Dean Church, if he could walk without crutches, hunted

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stags on the border of Dartmoor—when the stags hid in the hollows, their horns looked like bracken—or pheasants and partridges in the copses and fields. But to torture a chained bear! Nicholas knew the arguments. The sport was as old as the Norman Conquest. Bears were mindless brutes who deserved no sympathy. You had to beat them from time to time to show them their place. Still, Nicholas liked them. He did not want them tortured. He did not want his vicar to watch the torture. Or did he? It would simplify his task. He would feel less treacherous betraying a man who enjoyed such a sport.

It was then that he noticed the child. She had crept to the tree on noiseless slippers, a wee small girl with a black skirt and a white apron and hair as red as a brick fresh from a kiln. No such girl lived in the town or, so far as Nicholas knew, in the entire parish of four thousand acres.

The girl tugged on the hem of Robin's tunic. Her face looked sad and knowing for one so small, but not resigned; no, not in the least resigned. She had come on a mission and did not intend to fail. Her eyes were the green of tender young grass dusted with pollen. Their color was unmistakable because she never blinked; because she stared fixedly, almost hypnotically from Robin to Nicholas and back to Robin.

"Please, Sir, will you help my bear? They are going to hurt him." The voice was small but precise; polite but insistent and without that slight slurring which marked the speech of the Devonians.

"Of course I'll help him," said Robin, without wasting time to learn how the child had come by such an animal. He took her hand. "Nicholas, will you wait for me?"

But Nicholas did not intend to wait. There was a bear to be saved; there was a vicar who promised to become a hero instead of a sadist. With the help of the hawthorn trunk, he struggled to his feet, seized his crutch, and hobbled after Robin and the child.

He arrived in time to see a gratifying conclusion to the fight he had missed. Robin had taken Scobble across his knee and was whaling him with the same shepherd's crook which had lately prodded the unfortunate animal.

"And the next time I see you torturing a bear, I'll not only throttle you, I'll chain you to a tree so you can see how it feels!"

The crowd which had gathered to watch the baiting of a bear was not disappointed; the baiting and beating of Scobble, who was none too popular—he had a weakness for poaching—satisfied their sanguinary expectations. They had harvested the last wheat; they had eaten and drunk and watched a bully whaled with his own crook. They were easily angered, easily

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amused; roused to shout or laugh or no doubt burn a man at the stake. Children, he thought, whether boys in their belted tunics or old men in trousers and kerseys. Whether girls who flaunt their breasts like a huswife her melons, or women who have no breasts to flaunt. I too am a child. But there is a man among us and if he is bad, there is much to be said for the Devil.

Robin rose leisurely to his feet and flung the boy on the turf, like a miller discarding a sack of meal. Scobble was heavier than Robin and at least as tall, but he looked decidedly diminished when he was stretched on the ground. Cautiously he regained his footing, ready to rumble if Robin should look his way, and blubbered across the field toward Dean Church.

Robin freed the bear, first from the tree, then from his collar, a crude dog-collar much too tight for his neck—it had left a large red welt. The crowd muttered warnings. Didn't the Vicar know that bears were dangerous? They bit, they clawed, they crushed between their paws. . . .

Freed of his chains, he lingered gratefully with Robin's hand on his head.

"There, little fellow. Go with your friend. You'll know where to find the grasses to heal your wound. The least we can do, though, is feed you. Corinna, fetch a slab of mutton, will you?" To Nicholas, at least, Corinna and Julia looked like identical twins, comely but bovine and stupid.

"If you please, Sir," suggested the child, "I thank you for saving my bear. But a tankard of ale would be agreeable too."

"Your bear drinks ale?" smiled Robin.

Corinna tittered (or was it Julia? No, Corinna. There was, after all, a difference in the size of their breasts). "I'll fetch him some, Master Herrick. We'll make him sit on his haunches and beg."

Robin ignored her. "I have an ale-drinking pig in my vicarage," he continued to the child. He had placed a steadying hand on Nicholas' shoulder, less to support him than to include him in the conversation.

"Actually, my bear prefers beer."

"Is the ale for you then? Why, you ought to be drinking milk."

"It's for my mother."

Until that moment, no one, certainly not Nicholas, had noticed the woman who stood on the edge of the crowd. She was dressed severely in gray homespun, her hair concealed by a hood and cap. She might have been a Puritan except for her expression. She was looking at Robin with naked adoration. A true Puritan would have hidden her feelings; indeed, would not have felt them except for God. Then she saw Nicholas. She stared at him intently, as if the sight of him surprised and pleased but somehow

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troubled her.

"Thank you, Master Herrick," she said. "My daughter, Aster, and I are deeply grateful." The simple words conveyed more gratitude than a speech by the Public Orator of Cambridge. Her voice made Nicholas think of honeycombs from the woods and salt breezes from the Channel at the same time: sweet but not cloying. "And your young friend too. He would have helped except for his crutches. Not that you needed help!"

"My friend is called Nicholas, but you already seem to know my name. And yet you're not from this parish."

"Yes, I know your name." Her gray homespun caught the light of her smile and seemed to twinkle like fine silk. Her eyebrows were crimson. One could imagine her hair as a tumult of roses. "I am called Stella."

"May I ask where you live? And don't tell me in a sonnet. You are much too real for the lady in Sidney's poems." Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets, *Astrophel and Stella*, had been a favorite of Queen Elizabeth.

"In Dartmoor," she smiled.

She might have said, "In Hell."

First there was a hush; then there was a murmur; then you would have thought that Scobble had reappeared with his father and sixteen bears.

"But nobody lives there except the Gubbings," Julia cried.

"I live there."

Corinna had returned with the meat, a tankard of ale, and a pout. Aster fed the meat to her bear, whose wounds had not impaired his appetite, and Stella received the tankard without embarrassment. Most of the women in Dean Church drank ale, but delicately, fastidiously, as if it were cowslip wine. She smiled, not to the pouting Corinna but to Robin and Nicholas, and she seemed to include the two of them in an arc of radiance.

"Master Herrick, will you drink with me?"

"Thank you, Mistress Stella." He took the tankard and drank deeply of the potent beverage. Her lips had left a faint mark on the rim. He was careful to place his own lips in the exact spot. It was almost as if he had kissed her.

"And now you, Nicholas."

No! he wanted to shout. I will drink after Robin but not after you. He could not categorize this disturbing woman. Women, he had supposed, were either Puritans like his mother or wenches like Corinna and Chloe. But Stella smiled at him until he drank.

"The three of us have shared the same cup," she said. It was a simple statement, but she had the look of someone wreathed in daisy chains and leading a May Dance. Her eyes were greener than sparrow grass in the sun. "Now we must leave you."

Nicholas stared after them

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—mother and child, the bear between them—as they walked toward Dartmoor.

"Is she a Gubbing?" he whispered.

"I don't know," said Robin.

"I think she is," said Corinna, who had momentarily lost her looks. There is nothing more uglifying, Nicholas decided, than a mixture of malice and ignorance.

"Nicholas," said Herrick, ignoring the accusation. "Why don't you come to the Vicarage with me? Here, put your arm around my shoulder." He was a powerful man, a ruddy, young-old giant who came from London but seemed a child of the country. He smelled of wheat and violets, of a new-mown field and a cottage which seemed to grow in its own garden. He had thrashed Scobble without losing his breath and could have carried Nicholas without slowing his pace.

"Robin," Nicholas blurted at the risk of his immortal soul. "Don't you know they can burn you for consorting with Gubbings?"

Robin laughed. "Nicholas, the Puritans could burn me for half the things I do, and my own Anglicans for the other half. I won't burn easily, though. It will take a lot of logs." Then he grew serious. "You know, I haven't many friends here in Dean Church."

"What about Corinna? Julia?"

"Oh, a few girls fancy me, I suppose, but it isn't my friendship they want, though that's all they get." Nicholas believed him. "The men and the older women generally stay away from me. They liked their last vicar. His sermons were plain as the homespun of their shirts and gowns. He talked about Heaven as if he had been there, and Hell as if that was where nearly everybody else was going except his own parishioners. But they tell me—your father among them—that I'm too poetical for a man of God. 'God likes a plain-spoken man.' How do they know? Aren't the Psalms poetry? And the Song of Songs?"

"I expect it's your naughty poems they dislike. The one about Julia's clothes and how you get her out of them. I believe the last line runs, 'Oh how that glittering taketh me!'"

"I didn't get her out of them, she got out of them herself. I spied her swimming one day. Anyway, it's all of my poems they dislike, not just the amorous ones. And of course they imagine all kinds of dark things about me. Should you even be seen with such a man? You might be endangering yourself."

"No."

"Why not?"

Nicholas could not tell him the truth about his mission. But he told him another truth.

"Because you saved the little girl's bear."

"Suppose the girl was a Gubbing? Her mother too."

"If they were, they weren't wicked Gubbings."

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"All of them are supposed to be. According to your fellow villagers."

"But some of them aren't, are they?"

"Look," Robin said, pointing to three solitary figures, a woman in a dark robe who ought to be wearing wheat sprays and daisy chains, a small bear, and a small girl as they crossed the gently rolling fields between hayricks and over streams, toward that sinister plateau of bogs and tors which was called Dartmoor. They had paused now to look back at Robin and Nicholas. The woman and the girl, almost simultaneously, lifted their hands in goodbye. The bear raised his muzzle. Robin returned the salutation.

"Nicholas, my friend. How would you like to go with me to visit the Gubbings?"

"I don't know," he stammered. "I expect I would be afraid. *Nobody* goes there." Afraid, he meant, to discover damning evidence against his vicar.

"Except me. Think about it. First we'll go to the Vicarage and look at your leg. Then we shall dine together. Then, tomorrow—"

"I don't think I can walk as far as Dartmoor."

"We'll take my horse and you can ride pillion behind me."

"A horse in the moors? He may stumble in all that bracken."

"I can get off and lead him. What do you say?"

"Yes." Slowly. "Yes!" With growing excitement. "I'll go with you!" He had made up his mind. Whatever he saw in Dartmoor, he would come back to his father and tell such a lie as could hurl his soul from grace, to say nothing of getting his body burned at the stake. If it took a lot of logs to burn Robin, it would take very few to burn a thin little fellow like Nicholas. Still, he would have good company. The impious thought occurred to him that he would rather go to Hell with Robin than to Heaven with his father.

Robin gave him an affectionate hug. "That's my Nicholas. I'll tell you this much. I never saw the girl or the bear or the woman before. But I think we shall see them again. There was something about her eyes—"

"A yearning would you say?"

"And a giving at the same time. She seemed to be asking for help, and offering who knows what in return."

"Robin, has she bewitched you?"

"Yes, if you mean I can't get her out of my thoughts! But she isn't a witch. I'm sure of that."

"But a Gubbing—they can be very beautiful, can't they?"

"So I've heard."

"And dangerous. Some of them are said to lure men into bogs and drown them."

"According to a very old tradition—it was the first thing your neighbors told me when I came here—the Dartmoor Gubbings are not so wasteful. They

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eat their catches."

Chapter III

A little butterie, and therein
A little bin,
Which keeps my little loaf of bread
Unchipt, unflead. . . .

ROBIN'S POEM about his vicarage chirruped in Nicholas mind as they entered the cottage, large for Dean Church, small beside even the smallest manor house in the surrounding countryside. Built in the Middle Ages, it was timber-framed, with masonry between the timbers to guard the oak against moisture and decay. A parlor, a hall, a kitchen, and a butterie on the first floor; on the second, a gabled loft which Herrick called by the archaic term "solar" because it caught the sun in the windows of both gables. There he slept in a trundle bed whose trundle bedded his innumerable nieces and nephews when they came individually to visit him; there he escaped to read Catullus and Horace and write the sermons which his parishioners considered too poetical. And there he led Nicholas, by the little gatehouse on its vaulted undercroft; through the broken wall which had once enclosed not only the Vicarage but a monastery now in ruins and reduced to a mound of wild roses; along a path edged with rosemary and thyme.

Low is my porch, as is my Fate,
Both void of State,
And yet the threshold of my door
Is worn by the poor. . . .

"You're such a tall man, Robin. Don't you bump your head on the lintel when you go into the house?"

"No, I duck. It helps to keep me humble."

"You grow little flowers in your garden—forget-me-nots and sweetheart roses. Your bin holds hardly enough for the next meal, and you would rather eat two small loaves than one big one. You told me so yourself the first time I was here. Why is that? Your house fits me better than it does you."

"I don't really think about such things, Nicholas. I suppose it's because I grew too tall too fast. When I was a child I used to lie on my stomach and look a grasshopper straight in the eye. Then I was suddenly so large that I was stepping on him instead. I don't want to step on him. I want to make friends with him, though it's hard now—I frighten him. I have to fall on my knees to get down to his level, and often as not he jumps away from me. Still, I can put him in my poems, along with a world where he can feel at ease."

"And yet you're all the things a big man ought to be. The way you routed Scobble!"

"Hush, Nicholas. You'll make me proud. Don't you Puritans say

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that pride goeth before a fall?"

"If you fall," said Nicholas, forgetting his crutches, "I'll pick you up. Do you know, this is the first night since I had my accident that I haven't wished I were back in Cambridge."

"It's the first night since I came to Devon that I haven't wished I were back in London. My pig, Caligula, and I get tired of eating alone." Caligula, a gift from one of his nieces, had come to live in the Vicarage after Robin had lost his sparrow Phil, a gift from one of his nephews, to a predatory cat (a Puritan cat).

The previous Vicar had lived in the Vicarage with a richly dowried wife and kept a maid in the gatehouse. But Robin, of course, was wifeless, and he could hardly afford a maid on his salary of twenty-eight pounds a year. Thus he swept his own rooms, grew his own vegetables except for those brought to him by his parishioners, and, when his nieces and nephews were not visiting him, ate alone with Caligula. Tonight he served a simple supper of beets, purslain, water-cress, and boiled eggs.

"I'm no cook," Robin admitted. "I just dump something in the kettle and light a fire."

He was not being modest, he was being honest. But they had eaten heartily at the festival and Nicholas, for one, was so busy thinking about tomorrow's expedition to the moors that he hardly noticed the fare, except the water-cress, which seemed to him more fit for a duck than a man but which he ate out of deference to his host. They sat on wooden stools in the kitchen. A petit-point table cloth covered the table; pewter pipkins hung on the walls. A mouse, poised on one of the rafters, peered indifferently at the repast.

Robin had not forgotten his promise to look at Nicholas' leg. First he fed Caligula a mess of water-cress—there was a generous portion left from supper.

"Pigs are very clean if you give them a chance. Caligula is immaculate." (He was not, however, odorless; Nicholas dreaded his inevitable expansion into hog). "What is more, he's a watch pig. If the Hag ever tried to pay me a visit—in spite of my profession and several judiciously placed crusts of holy bread—he would let out such a squeal that she would instantly take flight." His smile could not conceal the seriousness of the subject. Everyone in Dean Church, even a newcomer like Robin, kept a watch animal, generally a dog. No invaders, neither Hag, nor Satan, nor Gubbings, had ever been caught in the town, but in the time of Elizabeth a dauntless blacksmith had mounted his horse and followed a Will-o-the-Wisp into Dartmoor and the next morning his horse had returned with a body strapped across the saddle, the nail marks of crucifixion in his hands and feet.

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"Now we must get you up the ladder into my solar. There isn't even a couch in my hall. That's where I hear the complaints of my congregation. But there's the trundle bed upstairs. You'll never get up the ladder, though, on those crutches. Lock your hands around my neck and I'll carry you up on my back."

"You don't think I'll drag you down?"

"If you do, I promise not to fall on you."

Once in the solar, Robin deposited him onto the trundle which lay beneath and beside the larger bed, like a baby dolphin beside its mother. The mattress was thin but soft with eiderdown.

"Now take off your boots and britches and let me look at that leg." Nicholas undressed with the double trepidation of a Puritan and a boy with skinny legs. But Robin was concerned with his injury, not his skinniness.

With careful hands he removed the bandage and surveyed the swollen flesh below the knee.

"I'm going to have to hurt you," he said. "Here. Drink this." He opened a cupboard under a window-seat and handed Nicholas a large mug which he filled with wine from a hogshead. It was the potent Spanish wine called Sack.

"But I drank at the festival. And again at supper."

"Yes. About a thimble full. Now drink."

Nicholas emptied the mug with surprising ease and felt relaxed and genial. Robin explored the break; the pain was considerable but tolerable; it did not explode through his body; it did not shriek in his mind.

"The bone is set straight but not mending properly. And you still have an open wound. I think we can help it along, though." He began to massage the limb with a plaster of dock leaves and iris roots. His big hands were surprisingly gentle.

"It's feeling better already," said Nicholas.

"That's because you're drunk," laughed Robin.

"Am I? Is it? Well, maybe a bit. Mainly, I think it's because you're so skilful."

"I'm not even an apothecary like your father, much less a physician."

"My father doesn't tend wounds. He doesn't like to touch people. The apothecary I had in Cambridge wasn't nearly as gentle as you are."

"He wasn't your friend."

Robin sat beside him on the bed. It was a chilly night; late summer nights in Devon were often chilly and there was no fire on the hearth. But Nicholas felt warm with ale and comradeship. It was time, he felt, to confess.

"My father sent me to spy on you, Robin. To find out if you know the Gubbings."

"I suspected he did, Nicholas, but I don't know them, and if I did, I don't think you would tell him."

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"But how did you know I wouldn't?"

"Because I like you too much. Love doesn't necessarily beget love, but friendship does beget friendship, at least between kindred spirits. You aren't really a Puritan, you see. You're a Roman like me. We love the same things."

"But I don't like Caligula," blurted Nicholas. "He resents me and I'm afraid of him."

"Never mind, you like bears and Morris dancers and—"

"Sack."

"You see!"

Nicholas astonished himself by throwing his arms around the man. "If you were *married* to a Gubbing, I still wouldn't tell anyone."

"If I were married to a Gubbing, we might adopt you. If we could manage to get rid of your present parents."

"I like my mother, you know. Maybe we could find a Gubbing husband for her—he might even let her show her hair—and serve my father to the wedding guests."

"Most Puritans aren't very edible. All bone and no meat. Look at you, Nicholas. One good bite and that's it. Though I hope to fatten you." (First he would have to find a cook.) "Go to sleep now. Will the little bed be comfortable? Caligula has kept it warm for you." Caligula was even now vacating the bed with an expression somewhere between vexation and calculation.

"You don't suppose he will tusk me in my sleep? I don't get on with domesticated animals. Either they urinate on me or they bite me."

"Does your father like them?"

"No. He says they may be familiars. He never even let me have a dog."

"Then you got your fear from him. All of your fears, I suspect. But if you'll let me, I'm going to put joys in their place. As for Caligula, he won't tusk you but he may try to shove you out of his bed. With your bad leg, I think you had better take the larger bed."

"But the little one just fits me. Your feet will lap over the end."

Robin would not listen to argument. He hoisted Nicholas into his own bed and, removing his tunic and bathing from a kettle of water which he had heated in the kitchen, he contorted himself into the trundle. He had to bend his knees and crook his head at an angle.

"You'll wake up feeling like a wilted water-cress. At least there's no room for Caligula." His own bed was wide and comfortable. The glow of the Sack had not forsaken him. He wanted to talk.

"Robin?"

"Yes, Nicholas?"

"What you need is a wife."

Robin's reply was prompt and terse:

Suspicion, discontent, and strife
Come in for dowry with a wife.

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"*All* wives?"

"Most wives. Remember I'm a vicar. I visit people in their homes. I ought to know."

"My mother didn't bring strife into her marriage."

"No, poor thing, your father never lets her say a word."

"She wouldn't say a harsh word even if he let her."

"Probably not. But I couldn't be married to a black robe and a white cap. In your mother's case, I suspect that what's underneath is not unattractive, and I don't just mean her body, but I wouldn't want to take the chance. You understand, I have nothing against women. I like their hair. I like their ankles. I like everything except their wagging tongues."

"Now my tongue is wagging."

"That's different. You aren't talking about knitting or the price of yarn or the Miller's daughter whose baby is due three months after she was married."

"Is your only objection to a woman's talkativeness? You could always tell her you had to think about your next sermon."

Robin looked pensive. "I guess I object to the *permanence* of marriage. Even if you loved roast suckling pig, you wouldn't want it every day, would you?"

"I'd soon get hungry for fish."

"Exactly."

"Have you often—dallied—with women?"

"Bedded down, do you mean? Not since I became a vicar. When I was at Cambridge, yes. Even when I was an army chaplain."

"Wenches?"

"Ladies as well. You'd be surprised how popular the Cambridge boys are with the daughters of earls and dukes. With their mothers too. Remember, that was some years ago. Queen Elizabeth had only been dead a few years, and this confounded Puritanism hadn't grown into a Hydra. We had fun in those days. Still, things are not that different now, are they, Nicholas? I mean, there are still wenches. Or so I would judge from the Corinnas and Julias of my parish."

"Are you going to remain chaste from now on?"

"I expect so," said Robin sadly. "No more duckling, no more fish. Except in my poems."

"It doesn't seem fair to the ladies. I saw the way Julia and Corinna looked at you. Almost as if you were a hot meat pie. I don't think you're too old. Why, at thirty-nine you ought to be good for another four or five years. But as you say, you *are* a vicar."

"But you aren't, Nicholas. What about you?"

"I'm not without experience."

"You've had a wench or two yourself?"

"No," sighed Nicholas. "But one of them sat in my lap."

"What did you do?"

"Tried to stand up."

"I forgot. You're a Puritan." It was not a reproach; it was a statement of fact.

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"But Robin," Nicholas protested. "The Bible is very explicit about fornication. It was different for you until you became a vicar. You're built for that sort of thing. You must feel more temptation than most men, and tempt more too. No one's going to flash her ankle at me. I have to go looking for sin, and that makes me all the more guilty."

"The Bible is inconsistent on the subject. Look at Abraham and his concubines. What is a concubine except another name for a harlot? And Solomon wasn't exactly monogamous."

"I never liked Abraham or Solomon as much as I should." It was a night for the truth. "In fact I disliked them both very much."

"I'm not surprised. Patriarchs, both of them. Like your father, in looks if not in deeds. How about David?"

"Oh, David is my favorite hero."

"David had several wives, including Bathsheba, whom he stole from another man, and uncountable concubines."

"But didn't you say you haven't fornicated since you became a vicar?"

"There's a time for everything, as the Preacher saith. I would disrupt my congregation if I started bedding the girls. The girls would be jealous of each other, the fathers would either beat them or me or burn us all at the stake."

"At least you could look a little harder for a wife without strife."

"I couldn't afford her on my twenty-eight pounds a year."

"The happiest vicars I know are married. There's George Herbert over at Bemerton. His church is too poor for an organ, but he managed to marry and support a wife. She cooks for him, I hear."

"Herbert is a saint. He brings out the best in a woman. I'd wind up with one who made me cook."

"Still, I'm going to help you look." Then he felt a tingling, not from pain, in his broken leg. It was almost as if someone had entered the room on silent sandals.

"Nicholas," said Robin quietly. "Don't be frightened. But there's a light in the window."

"The moon?"

"That's on the other end of the house. Besides, notice how this one bobs up and down."

"Will-o-the-Wisp!"

"Yes. This time I'm going to follow it."

"No, Robin, please don't go!"

"You'll be quite safe here. You can bolt the door after me and put a crust of holy bread under your pillow, and Caligula has wicked teeth, in case anything gets past the door."

"But who's going to help you on the moors?"

"I'll carry a vial of holy water. Hang it around my neck. Then, too, I'm a vicar, even if not a very good one. I have some incantations—or should I say prayers—at my command."

"Oh, Robin, you know that's not enough on the moors. In *their*

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country. Vicars are the rarest delicacy of all! You'll fall in a bog and drown or else be trapped and eaten."

"I'll be as tough as a Puritan. There's meat on my bones, but it's all sinewy from walking and gardening."

"Stop joking. I'm going too."

"On crutches?"

"You think I'll slow you down?"

"I think you may get hurt. I can't let you take the chance."

"I'll follow you then, and probably drown in a bog."

Robin looked at him with searching affection. "All right. You can come too."

"We're going to find the woman and the little girl, aren't we?"

"Stella and Aster. Yes, I hope so."

"Then she *has* bewitched you."

"No. But I think she's sent for me."

THE HORSE was small, old, and tired from supporting a man and a boy. Also, he was frightened; there were no sounds, but chill gusts of wind set him to shivering, and his little hooves stepped tentatively among the bracken and heather. Even a penurious vicar could have afforded a younger horse, but this poor animal had been consigned by its owner, Scobble's father, to a meat pie and Robin had bought him to save his life. Bucephalus was more than grateful, he was worshipful, and there was probably no other horse in Dean Church who would carry not one but two masters into Dartmoor at night without even whinnying a protest.

Will-o-the-Wisp had led them for almost an hour, a far, small radiance now seen, now invisible, a sort of firefly erratically flickering but certainly leading them into the heart of Dartmoor.

"What is it, Robin?"

"A lantern, I expect. When it pauses, I can almost distinguish the outline of—"

"A very small being like—"

"The girl who lost her bear."

Already they had begun to complete each other's sentences. "I hope so. And I hope we're being directed and not lured."

Bucephalus' hooves crumbled a clump of furze. Except for its yellow flowers—they had to guess the yellow in the dim moonlight—it resembled the skeleton of a plant, with spiny, brittle branches like fleshless hands. Soon they were riding among the tors, those rock grotesqueries which seemed to have taken root in a soil as harsh as themselves. The Gubbings were not the first to occupy these moors. Before the Roman conquest the Celts had built stone cairns and slab graves and an occasional fort, now in ruins. Who then were the Gubbings? Sophisticated Londoners suggested that they were escaped criminals or a little pocket of Celts untouched by the coming of Roman, Saxon, Viking, and Norman. But it was a London blacksmith who had rid-

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den into the Moors with a skeptical smile and a promise to return with a Gubbing "strapped behind me like a dead stag."

"Robin."

"Yes, Nicholas?"

"Do you believe in Hell?"

"I'm supposed to. I'm a vicar in the Church of England."

"Do you?"

"No. Only in heaven, and not the kind with harps. In my heaven, men and women drink Sack and dance Morris Dances and never get married."

"Hush, Robin! What if you're wrong? You'll open a pit at our feet!"

"I'll fall into it. You'll end up with the harp."

"I believe in Hell," said Nicholas staunchly, "but if you're going, I am too. I suppose I can learn to play a flute."

"I think we're there already."

Will-o-the-Wisp had vanished among the tors. The glow from the moon lay like a bloody mantle on the stone outcroppings. The air was dank and moist, as if from a cave; brackish too from the bogs; wispily sweet at times with the scent of furze flowers.

"Robin and Nicholas."

It was a woman's voice. She spoke their names with intimate familiarity.

"Is it Stella?"

"Who else? My daughter has led you here. Get down from your horse, Robin."

"How do we know you for sure?"

A small figure, carrying a lantern, skittered behind the rocks. It was Will-o-the-Wisp.

But the capturing hands were not those of a child and the questioner was not Stella.

"Is it true what they say about you, Robert Herrick? That you found a village of virgins and left it a village of whores?"

Chapter IV

NICHOLAS WAS fully prepared for the earth to open her umber jaws and swallow them into the Hell of the Gubbings. Since his accident at Cambridge, his imagination had rioted like a garden of unholy flowers, Eden bereft of Adam. They will cast off their black disguises, he thought, and drag us into their warrens, their witcheries, their wantonings: a banquet hall supported by massive columns in the shape of May poles, garlanded with ivy and flowered with crimson poppies; Will-o-the-Wisps like torches illuminating the hall. In the shifting light, in the shadows of sin and pleasure, Maenads and Satyrs will drink from ram-horn cups; reel and sing and copulate. . . . And then the ultimate feast. . . .

But Will-o-the-Wisp was a little girl in a black robe and carrying a lantern, and there were neither tunnels nor banquet halls, there was a passage between two tors, and a space like an amphitheatre, and the town of the Gubbings.

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It seemed to Nicholas a town of absences. Absence of color except for the borrowed pallor of the rising sun: browns and grays and blacks. Absence of sound except for the slush of boots in the moist earth. The rough, sod-built houses resembled immense bird nests, but no vines softened the earthen austerity, no birds sang among morning glories. Strip away the vines, destroy the birds of Dean Church; blight it with winter to cold gray walls, and it was still a richness to this bleakness, a honeycomb to a wasp nest. This was a town which belonged indisputably to the night, and it seemed affronted by the sun; received its rays only to further bare its own unutterable barrenness. Even the black magic of the witch or the warlock was supposed to conjur demons of scarlet malevolence.

"Robin," Nicholas whispered, "the people look like the houses. I knew they might be evil, but I thought they would be —wondrous. I knew this might be Hell, but I expected orgies or demons. How can evil be so dull?"

Robin gripped his arm. "There is something hidden here. It's as if the town were wearing a mask."

Black-robed men, women in pointed hats and black gowns, opened their doors to look at them with no visible surprise and emerged from their houses to join their captors with a slow measured gait, amost as if they were joining a funeral procession. The tips of Nicholas' crutches sank into the soggy earth and he withdrew them with difficulty; he advanced with lurches and jerks. Robin stopped to help him.

"Get along, you womanizer!" Someone struck Robin's thigh with a shepherd's staff.

With a twist and a pull, Robin seized the staff, broke its oaken hardness across his knee, and flung the pieces into the papyrus-wrinkled face of the man who had struck him.

"We're not sheep," he said. "If you poke me again, you may well find me an ill-tempered bear."

The man subsided into the crowd with a curious, crowlike caw; the others were content to lead, flank, and follow without in any way hurrying or even touching their captives.

The woman whom they had mistaken for the lady of the Harvest Home—the others called her Judith, and she appeared to be roughly equivalent to an Old Testament Judge like Deborah —paused in front of the one building which did not resemble its neighbors. It was built in the shape of an enormous crucifix, and of timbers instead of sod. The door and the windows captured in small the cruciform of the whole. It seemed a place in which to celebrate death.

In the shadow of her church, she looked at them with a regal and half contemptuous pity; she was no forgiving Mary, she was

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ready to judge and if necessary condemn two sinners who were so far beneath her, so tainted and soiled and unforgivable that the very touch of them would taint her, and yet she would still condescend to touch them if only her touch might save.

"I have brought you to our Tabernacle," she said. "As you may have guessed, it is also our place of judgment."

"If we're to be judged, may I ask our crime?" Not even this place of shadows can dim Robin's splendor, thought Nicholas. He is an archangel. No, he is Apollo.

She smiled her remote, pitying smile. "Robert Herrick, do you need to ask? Well, you shall have your answer. In the Tabernacle."

The Gubbings, it began to seem, were no more than a sect of Puritans. The Puritans punished sinners by locking them into stocks or pillories, sometimes by cropping their ears, but human sacrifice, cannibalistic feasts, the sins attributed to the Gubbings—unthinkable! He ought to feel relief. Why did he feel a shivering down his limbs like the scurry of spiders? It was—what was the word?—the covertness of the place which chilled him. Behind their concealment of robes and silence, these seeming Puritans were either more—or less—than human.

The Tabernacle, though named for the famous shrine of the Old Testament, lacked its riches, its silver and gold; lacked even the simple graces of Robin's church. Robin's church was small and poor; its benches were hard and uncushioned. There was no organ. But there were always flowers on the altar—Robin brought them from his vicarage garden—sunflower and marigold and daisy. Daisies were his favorite "because of their modesty." And the light which flowed through the plain glass windows lit a large Bible in gilt leather—a gift from Robin—on a table rimmed with a fretwork of wood which had cost—or given—some craftsman many hours of labor.

No flowers here; the Bible was black, ponderous; it rested beside another and equally forbidding volume of an unembellished table with stiff oak legs. The benches, black too, looked as if people could sit on them for a thousand years and never buckle their stern, sturdy legs. And in the nave of the church stood a squat cross, with a fully clothed, black-robed Christ whose face seemed to Nicholas that of his father or Moses. The only color in all the room was the blood which ran profusely from his hands and feet. Such an image, so large and centrally placed, might have smacked of popery had it not seemed the work of a dour, dutiful woodcutter instead of an inspired artist.

"And so," she said, "the Vicar of Dean Church has come at last to the church of the 'infamous Gubbings.' You won't find infamy here, however. Perhaps you will

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find the God you seem to have confused with Pan." She was as arrogant and, to judge from her face, as beautiful as a male peacock. One felt that there must be plumage concealed beneath her robes.

"There's no joy in the place," said Robin. "You say I've turned God into Pan. You've turned Christ into a Puritan."

She did not condescend to answer him; smiling, pitying, she stepped behind a pulpit like a black tombstone while the pews filled with men and women and began to resemble a rookery of silent crows.

But joy entered the place.

Stella and Aster were dressed like the others in death, but their faces were life. Among those hushed and sinister crows, they still seemed capable of song and joyful flight. In spite of his fear, in spite of the place and the peril, Nicholas made a vow: If Stella will help Robin, I'll even encourage him to marry her.

Judith extended her hands in a gesture of benediction and then uplifted them in a summons to rise. The crackling of those stiff, innumerable robes was like the lumbering of crows from a field of grain. It was only Judith who sang, however. Nicholas had never heard this particular hymn, though Puritan hymns were sung in his own cottage. ("Because that Anglican vicar has no sense of pain. He forgets what happened between Christmas and Easter.") Exultance shone in her face; strong feelings were allowable when singing a hymn to God. Exultance and something closer to pride than any Puritan would have dared to admit. He wondered if she herself had written the words, their cruelty almost concealed in the smooth rhymes, the strength and resonance of her voice.

God, descend in wrath and fire,
Burn the burnings of desire;
Christ, who walked upon the sea,
Salt the sores of lechery. . . .

Judith began to speak. Her voice was stern and judicial but so far, at least, without condemnation.

"We have among us the Vicar of Dean Church. Our friends in the village have heard him preach. They have watched him at the Harvest Home. They have visited him in his vicarage. What are the charges against him?"

"Insobriety." The speaker was a hunchback. Nicholas recognized him from the village: Scope, the young Cobbler. Robin had bought a pair of boots from him because he supposed from his tight, bleached face that the youth was in pain.

"True, Master Herrick?"

"I haven't been drunk since I came to Dean Church."

"Before then?"

"Several times. When I came back to England after the battle of Rhé, I was drunk for three days." The English had sent an expedi-

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tion against the French on the Isle of Rhé and suffered a murderous defeat. Robin, an army chaplain at the time, had helped to nurse the dying; he had even helped to amputate a man's leg.

"And in Dean Church you have frolicked with virgins at the Harvest Home and caroused in the Vicarage. True?"

"I have celebrated the abundance of the fields and the hospitality of the hearth. I have drunk freely of brandy and Sack, even as Christ drank wine at the wedding of friends. But not once have I clouded my senses or faltered in my step."

"You have lain with the girls of the parish."

"Never!"

"Julia? Corinna?"

"Not one of them."

"But you have lechered after them. You have gazed at their breasts with carnal longings. Only fear of exposure has held you back."

"Yes, I have looked at them. Admiring their fresh young beauty—"

"Desiring?"

"Yes, desiring. I am not made of granite."

"Flesh, fleshly. You stand self-condemned. And there are other crimes."

"He plays a flute on Sunday." It was the Cobbler's wife. Her face, once roseate and smiling, had been deformed by the Plague; she looked like a blighted rose-bud.

"He writes verses about fornication." It was the Seamstress, a plump little owl of a woman who never ruffled her feathers. She might have been saying: "He takes a walk in the morning."

"And you, Nicholas. We are told that your father set you to spy on this man. Is it true that you sought his friendship at your father's behest?" She looked at him with a question in her eyes as well as her words. She seemed to be offering him a chance to save himself by disavowing his friend. She seemed to be saying: You do not need to become a martyr. We are not murderers, we are judges, and we wish to know the facts. He saw in that fearfully seeing eye of his brain the nature of a martyr's death. He saw the stake like the skeleton of a tree. He felt the thongs as they tore his wrists; the smoke acrid in his nostrils; the flames like climbing, scorching snakes.

"My father said that Robin —Master Herrick—was suspected of consorting with the Gubbings. I was to see if the charges were true."

"In Dean Church, those who are not Gubbings believe us to be a remnant of the old fairy folk, linked now with the Devil. In other words, your father set for you a godly mission, even as Joshua sent his spies into the city of Jericho. Did you come with the Vicar to spy upon him? To see if the charges against him were indeed true?"

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"No!" He thundered his answer like a Puritan condemning a sinner to Hell. "I told him about my mission. He forgave me."

"He forgave you! For betraying your father's trust? Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother. . . . Why, Nicholas, why?"

"Hush, little friend," whispered Robin. "There's no need to share my punishment."

"Because I love him."

"You love a man you have known for a few days better than your father and your mother? Such capriciousness is hard to conceive. Unless you are one of those whom the angels of the Lord discovered in Sodom."

He would have thrown his crutch at her if he had not needed it to support his weight. He could only fling words, but he flung them like David hurling stones with his slingshot.

"If you burned me at the stake, I wouldn't betray him!" Then, quietly, "I love him, but not like you say. As Jonathan loved David."

"He's telling the truth," said Robin. "He thought me wrongly accused in the town. He came with me here to Dartmoor only to clear my name. You've accused me of drinking and lechery and writing bawdy verses. He's guilty of none of these things. He's the gentlest boy I've ever known."

"Your sins have been enumerated. He stands condemned by flaunting his friendship for you."

"Condemned by whom? What are you, Judith? You and your people? I have heard that the Gubbings are more than men. That they are—"

"Beast men? Master Herrick, I thought you would have guessed. The stories which terrify the good folk of Dean Church—it is we ourselves who spread them. That the Gubbings are 'godless and bestial.' That the Gubbings 'eat human flesh.' "

"And Will-o-the-Wisp?"

"A man with a lantern. Or a child, as tonight. Nothing more."

"Why?"

"To frighten the curious, why else? We want no Englishmen lumbering through our tors to steal our tin or tempt our children into godless paths. Except for you, Robert Herrick. Indeed, we wanted you. We have wanted you since you first arrived in Dean Church. Your predecessor was a foolish but not an evil man. We tolerated him. In you, we hoped for one like ourselves. But we heard of your ale-flushed features; of how you swam in the streams by moonlight, naked and shameless, like Adam before the fall. A snare for young women and so it would seem for boys. Yes, we wanted you, and we spread the charge that you were in league with us. How better to make you angry and curious? How better to lure you here?"

"You are nothing more than men?"

"God-fearing men."

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"I don't believe you," he said. "There is something about you. A secrecy. An *ancientness.*"

"We are simply God's chosen to punish those who do not fear and honor Him."

"Apparently we worship a different God. Yours is a God of wrath and thunderbolts. He razes cities and drowns or burns his enemies. You've lost yourselves in the Book of Kings; you haven't even reached the prophets."

"You will see, Master Herrick, that we are well acquainted with the Gospels. For example, with crucifixes." She turned to the congregation. The faces were not, after all, identical. The Cobbler's wife did not resemble the Seamstress. The red welts on her face glowed like copper ingots in a fire. The Seamstress sat in smug, unruffled superiority. There, a farmer with vacant blue eyes who looked more puzzled than condemning. There, a child whose bright little moon of a face sat undiminished beneath its black bonnet (was it she who, carrying a lantern, had led them into the moors?).

"My friends, we must choose our punishment carefully for a man who has turned God's house into a pagan temple. Who seems, in fact, to have confused God with Pan. And for the Sodomite boy who, rejecting his own godly parents, has chosen to follow this self-avowed pagan."

"Damn you," Robin swore. "Damn you, Judith, and all your sanctimonious Puritans. I've never cursed anybody except the Spaniards, but if you hurt my friend, I'll call on that God you seem to think is so ready with thunderbolts, and see if he has one for you!"

Judith answered him with a wry smile. "The accused threatens us in our own Tabernacle. Shall it be the stocks for him?"

"The stocks are for those who fall asleep in church or use God's name in vain. Sins, but petty. Forgivable." It was the Cobbler's wife. Perhaps the Plague had made her a Puritan. "A hundred lashes across that flesh which he so shamelessly bares. As many for his friend!"

"Too few! Too few!"

"What then? What penance to equal the guilt?"

"Perhaps," said the Seamstress, crossing her hands in her lap as if she had just laid aside a needle and thread, "the Ceremony of the Cross."

There was such a hush as must have proceeded the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius or the fiery rain on Sodom and Gomorrah. Even Judith was momentarily dumb.

"So be it," she said at last.

"So be it. The Ceremony of the Cross!"

"Is there any dissent?"

"Yes."

The word tolled like a ship's bell, sweet but penetrating; indeed, irresistible. People looked at the speaker; stared and frowned at her. She smiled; she

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glowed. She might have been sculptured in bronze. There was bronze, too, in her voice when she rose to face the congregation.

"In our own Book of Redemption, a prisoner who is accused of a crime against God is allowed a trial."

"We have already tried him, Stella."

"In the Middle Ages, a condemned man was allowed a trial by combat. He was allowed to meet his accuser with sword or pike and prove his innocence or reveal his guilt."

"I know the Book of Redemption by heart. There is no mention of a trial by combat."

"But there is mention of Trial by Rhyme. The poet Ossian defended himself against a man who accused him of conjuring Beelzebub."

And Derleth thundered like the clashing of a thousand battle axes:

"Cursed are they who desecrate God's name."

And Ossian replied, proud in the knowledge of his innocence:

"But to believers an undying fame. . . ."

And so they continued, Derleth flinging his lines like spears, Ossian catching them in the steel-linked net of his words, until the poem was perfect and the accuser stood accused.

"This man is known for his facile gift of rhyme, his bawdy but artfully turned verses. Are you suggesting that if I lose to him, I myself shall stand accused?"

"Only that we should reconsider his punishment. And it hardly seems likely that you will be defeated. Haven't you graced our Tabernacle with the finest hymns since the Book of Redemption? You are his accuser and through you, God. Even if you were not yourself a poet, God would speak through you in order to condemn him. Unless we have judged him too harshly."

Nicholas waited for Judith to silence this astonishingly outspoken woman, who dared to suggest that justice was not always to be found in a Tabernacle shaped like a crucifix. Perhaps, for reasons known only to herself, Judith did not choose to question.

"Very well then. He shall have his Trial by Rhyme. But I shall choose the subject. And if he fails to match my line and my rhyme in the alloted space of—"

"One drip of a water clock. Or so it says in the Book."

"Then he has lost the trial."

"And if he wins?"

"He shall keep his life."

"And Nicholas?"

Judith shrugged. "Nicholas too. He is of small worth, dead or alive."

"And if he loses?"

"We shall raise their crosses side by side."

"At any rate," someone whispered, "we'll get to eat their horse."

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Book Two: Stella

Chapter V

THERE WERE occasional mornings when she awoke in a web of melancholy. Her ancestors had flown with the eagles, but her contemporaries lived in cottages built of sod; she had married a human sailor and lived with him in Exeter, overlooking a harbor where, before she was hatched, the *Ark Royal* had unfurled her sails and sped against the Armada; but now she lived, a widow with a small daughter and an aging bear, in a windmill which no longer ground grain.

She did not encourage the mood. There were much worse things than losing the power of flight: her people might have grown to look like ostriches instead of Puritans. There were much worse things than losing a beloved husband: never having had a husband to lose.

This particular morning she paused on the rush carpet beside her bed in a guiltless pleasure of nakedness. I am the only Puritan, she thought, and certainly the only Gubbing, who does not muffle herself for bed as tightly as a bear in his winter coat. She kindled the coals on the hearth; yes, this particular windmill boasted a fireplace and chimney, her own additions to a room whose simplicity had once bordered on sparsity. A miller had built the mill and lived here before her and Aster. Mistaken for a warlock in Dean Church because of his power over animals—he had kept a bear in his cottage—he had fled to the land of the Gubbings, who had tolerated him, though he was both a human and an Anglican, because he supplied them with flour. But tolerance was not the same as acceptance; he had ground grain and pined and finally, in spite of his bear, Artor, died of loneliness, leaving the machinery to rust and the bear to need a master; and she had returned from Exeter, adopted the bear, and metamorphosed the lower story into a room as bright and intimate as the nest of a lyre bird.

With the help of an exceptionally durable wagon and two stalwart horses, subsequently eaten by the Gubbings, she had smuggled a small treasure from her house in Exeter: hard joint stools of the kind which disgraced nearly every dwelling in Devon, Puritan or otherwise, but which she had graced with the fashionable new worsted material known as Turkey work. A tall-backed wainscot table-chair, whose back, when lowered into a table, provided space for pewter dishes and pottery mugs, for oat clap bread and rose tip wine. An oval cradle on wooden rockers, with oak-panelled sides, in which Aster's father had rocked her even before she had hatched from her egg, and beside which Artor, old, petulant, but grateful, stirred with

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ursine dreams. A chest on tall wooden legs, rather like a walking box, which bore a nef or jewelled ship freighted with spices, and a maple wassail bowl, its silver top entwined with lacings of gold, and a miniature wooden tree trunk hollowed to hold an altar to the woodpecker god Picus and Mother Goose, his favorite saint. Finally, at the back of the room, her clavicytherium, an Elizabethan spinet, with stool and keyboard and back like the spreading tail of a peacock. She had fashioned the room to dazzle the eye, to tease the ear; being a Gubbing, a bird woman, she saw and heard as sharply as a lark. (Like all of her race, however, she lacked a sense of smell, and the spices in the nef, though she knew them to be aromatic —clover, cinnamon, storax— pleased her only with their colors and their textures).

She stepped onto the porch and looked above her at the four blades of lattice-work like enormous wings; if the wind blew, as now, the whole structure turned gently on a huge oaken post strutted to the ground. No longer did the millstones turn in the top story and grain flow through a tunnel, slide down a shoot, and fall beneath the stones to emerge as flour. But the mill continued to turn even if not to grind, and she stretched the diminutive wings which sprang, like thwarted flames, from her shoulders, and remembered the old time, the time of flight. According to the Book of Redemption, a collection of ancient legends vampirized of their joy and infiltrated by the harsher commandments of the Old Testament, her people were fallen angels, condemned forever, at least in the temporal world, to suffer and climb and atone. But she carried in her veins the blood of royalty; she knew that her people had indeed fallen from the sky, the victims of a plague called Feather Blight, but that they had never been those insipid angels of the folk who had conquered them. Today they were known as Gubbings, but once they had been the Skykings or woodpecker folk who had dwelled in Italy and England and built their homes in the branches of kingly oaks. Such facts were recorded in the Book of Rejoicing, a forbidden volume which she kept in her chest and guarded as if it were a newly hatched egg.

Most of the females of her race were drab, colorless beings; it was the males whose wings and plumes, though diminished (if not altogether vanished) were crimson beneath their black surplices. But Stella's ancestress had been a queen, and Stella's wings, however small, and her hair, a flurry around her shoulders, were as red as the richest roses which flamed up the walls of Robert Herrick's vicarage.

She stretched her wings and remembered the not so old time with Philip in Exeter. It seemed

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to her that the mill revolved backward in time until dawnglow became hearthfire, and Philip, her husband, her lover, lounged in front of the fire, flushed with brandy and flames. His ship sat at harbor, poised for the morning tide. But it was still evening.

He opened his arms to share his nakedness. There was a splendor upon him, a fire but not of the hearth. *And Zeus descended in a golden shower. . . .*

"Come, my Stella, my star, my witch. Loosen your robes. The firelight will clothe you."

He had lost an eye to a Spaniard's pike; a sword had ribboned his chest. *But what a piece of work is man. . . .*

"I'm a fallen angel," she laughed. "Aren't you afraid I'll steal you away to Hell?"

"Afraid? Only of time. Why do you stand there, girl, chattering like some little huswife at her spinet?"

"NOW YOU ARE SAFE," he said.

"From the Spaniards?"

"Yes."

"And the Gubbings?" She had told him about her people in Dartmoor and her flight to Exeter.

"Yes." He cupped his chin in his hand and gazed at her with an admiration more intoxicating than ale. "Your thighs are an inspiration." Then the practical sailor replaced the lover. "It must be the fusion of bones without air sacs around the pelvis."

"Air sacs and pelvises! I wish I had never explained the anatomy of my race. You call yourself the last Elizabethan. Do you think Essex would have courted Elizabeth in such a fashion? If he had, he would have lost his head much sooner than he did."

"I've already courted you," he said. "I've married you, haven't I?"

"And courtship ends with marriage?"

"Your thighs give harbor to my wandering pinnace. How is that for a metaphor? Blank verse, too."

"Worthy of Shakespeare! But you never wrote me a sonnet."

"I'm a sailor, not a poet."

"Never mind, I never wanted a sonnet."

"An epic?"

"Firelight."

BUT REMEMBERING made her sad. She opened her arms to catch the wind, a chilly lover at dawn, even to a woodpecker woman whose body temperature exceeded that of a human by fourteen degrees. She preferred the sun, but soon the Gubbings would be about their work. Growing beets, she thought, with a wry smile; or mining tin; or cutting squares of sod for their earthen huts; or waiting a chance to spy on her and accuse her of shamelessness and invade her mill to condemn its riches; and, who could say, sentence her to the Ceremony of the Cross, a high-sounding name for crucifixion, in spite of her royal lineage.

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As it was, she did her work; she spun, she gardened—yes, even beets—she attended the Tabernacle and the town meetings. She pretended to think that an England ruled by Puritans could redeem itself from the "Bacchanalias of the bitch queen, Elizabeth." She had suffered humiliations, even practiced hypocrisies for the sake of her nine-year old daughter, Aster.

But now it was almost as if she had learned to fly. She had met Robin Herrick. With the uncompromising, slightly rueful honesty which peppered her love of luxury, romance, wonder—rare dishes and exotic journeys—she assessed her body. I am freckled, she thought, even to my toes. Philip said that I reminded him of a strawberry patch, and he always wished for a pail. But Robin may prefer a whiter skin. Some of these Devon wenches, though stupid as cows, are as white as milk. Furthermore, my breasts are petite instead of voluptuous and, unlike that shameless girl they call Corinna, I have never escaped from my bodice. Even in the lost time, when a breast was for fondling as well as feeding, our wings could not support too generous globes. All in all, I am slender and small of bone—some of my bones are hollow!—and if a man wants what they call in these parts "a real heft of a woman," I am not for him. And my hair —she helped the wind to tousle it and appraised its silken texture —is it not perhaps too red for a man with golden hair?

In a phrase, she concluded, I am more than adequate but less than provocative. In a word, middling. I have had one husband, I loved him well and my body flourished beneath his care, but now there is a certain —indecisiveness—about me, summer threatened by imminent fall. Strawberries bursting on the vine, and no one to pick them. After all, I am thirty. I could choose a husband among my own people. But I would rather marry a Spaniard than a Gubbing or one of those louts from Dean Church—Scobble and his kind. (Several Gubbings had asked for her hand; if she had been proud, she would have admitted that much of the congregation—that is to say, all of the men—wanted her, and whenever she bared an ankle, a hundred souls threatened to fall from grace. If she had been proud, she would have admitted that to call herself "more than adequate" was to call London "more than a village.") I could crumple my wings beneath a gown and cloak, even as here in Dartmoor. I could walk to Exeter, as I did as a girl when I went in search of a husband. But now I have Aster. It is hard for a little girl to hide her wings when she is with her playmates, playing Hoodman's Blind or Trap Ball or Bear Leader. And wings mean witch in every English town, and witch means burning for the

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mother and drowning for the daughter.

But Robin was not in a town, he was in a village, and Dean Church, quite unknown to its lustier citizens, had been infiltrated by the Gubbings. She had met the Vicar in a way which reminded her of the old merry times when wonders were as numerous as sparrow nests in spring. Often she and Aster walked to the edge of Dartmoor and watched the farmers in the fields. The Gubbings dressed like Puritans—they were, after all, the first and the worst Puritans—and the farmers took them for strangers from the next parish.

Sometimes they lingered after dusk to watch the moon rise above the unharvested wheat. Before the coming of Christianity, the Gubbings had worshipped the moon as a god, not a goddess, and when he rose above the hills, he was said to be the daybird sun, sheathing his brilliance for the sake of his love, the nightbird Sirius. Swallows, moonenkindled, wheeled in a Milky Way above their heads. Pisgies or souls of the dead, according to the Book of Rejoicing, which taught that the good might return as birds or animals to protect the ones they had loved. Lost souls, damned souls waiting to enter Hell, according to the Book of Redemption. But who could be lost in the light of such a moon?

"Mama," Aster had whispered. Like "Stella," the name meant "star," but Aster resembled a daisy, piquant rather than fiery. "We aren't alone. There in that stream—" A multitude of streams spiderwebbed the whole parish. "Someone is swimming. Is it a Merrow?"

The Merrow men, and this was decidedly a man—he wore no discernible clothes—were red of nose and green of teeth and quite insatiable for women, Merrow or mortal.

"Yes, I see. But he isn't a Merrow. You only find them in Ireland. And we mustn't spy on him."

"Why not? We spy on the farmers and they aren't half as glimpsy. He looks so alone. Why don't we join him?"

"I'm afraid we can't," she sighed. "If we took off our gowns, he would suspect our wings. Even beneath our petticoats."

"Then let's stay and watch."

"If you'll keep very quiet."

"Quiet as a wren hiding from a cat!"

The stream meandered through a field of wheat, but there were copses of hawthorn along the bank, and a clump of sedges, used by the farmers as a source of bog hay, at the edge of the water. Stella and Aster tiptoed as lightly as quail behind the rushes. The moonlight touched the stream with ruddy fingers; there were cuckoos crying in the copses, a sweet sound to Stella, though Englishmen thought them cruel because they laid their eggs in the

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nests of other birds. The season was summer instead of spring, late for the cuckoos to sing their two-noted song, but she almost joined them when she saw the swimmer's face. But of course she did not dare to sing. Her singing was that of a bird, not a woman, or rather of a hundred birds —nightingale, lark, merle —opening their throats in a song so woundingly beautiful that a listener must stop his ears, like Odysseus with the Sirens, or break into uncontrollable sobs. No wonder her people were sometimes burned as witches! If he tracked such a song to its source, he might not accuse her but he would certainly question her. She did not fancy having to explain how someone dressed like a Puritan could sing like a Siren. Not to him. He was not a man to whom one could easily lie. The moon and the birds—he felt them too; he began to whistle the old folk song, "Greensleeves." If I could wear green for him, she thought, instead of funereal black! Would Philip take offense in whatever celestial tavern feasted his soul? Had he not said to her before he died, "Don't wait too long between hearthfires. You were never meant for the cold." She had waited nine years.

He stepped from the stream, a beardless river god—no red nose for him, nor green teeth—and held out his arms as if he were thanking the cuckoos and yet asking more than they could give. But he was not Philip; he was neither more nor less, he was himself; there was about him the same manliness she had loved in Philip, but a different, deeper gentleness. Not that Philip had ever been ungentle to her. But this man, she felt, could cup a sparrow in his hand and feed him sunflower seeds.

It was going to be very hard for a while to open her arms only to the wind, and she almost shouted "No!" when he stooped to recover his clothes. To imprison such beauty in serge or homespun—a desecration! It would be like caging a bird. But once he was dressed in tunic and sandals, he might have been the woodpecker god, Picus, except that his hair was gold instead of red. Perhaps he was a phoenix god.

"Shall we call to him, Mama?"

Aster's voice was the thin, far piping of a cricket.

"Mama?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because—"

"I know. Our wings. But I'm not afraid to take the chance."

They watched him in silence as he moved toward the town, reluctantly, hating, it seemed, to leave the stream and the birds. She felt as if the moon had set.

It was Aster who found the parchment, and the poem scribbled in scarcely legible letters with a quill pen.

"See, he has left us a message, even though he never saw us!

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Shall I read it to you, Mama? The villagers will see our lantern and think we're Gubbings. Isn't it funny, we really are."

To Robin Red-Breast

Laid out for dead, let thy last kindness be
With leaves and moss-work for to cover me:
And while the Wood-nymphs my cold corpse inter,
Sing thou my Dirge, sweet-warbling Chorister!
For Epitaph, in foliage, next write this,
Here, here the tomb of Robin Herrick is.

"But it's so sad. And yet he looked happy in the stream."

"He was happy then." She had seen his face. "Too much so to carry such a sad poem home with him." But what loneliness had brought him there in the first place, uncompanioned, to write his own epitaph? She knew him now to be the wifeless Vicar, he whom her fellow Gubbings condemned as a womanizer and a tippler, both of which charges rather endeared him to her. (Philip had womanized until he had met her. "How can you judge a lyre until you've plucked a lot of strings?" he had laughed. They had drunk from the same mug, and he had laughed again, "Stella, I believe you could outdrink me if I gave you the chance.")

"We should have spoken to him," said Aster.

"Perhaps you're right."

"Is it too late to overtake him?"

"Now it is. Perhaps we'll meet him again."

"Mama, I liked his difference. Those slim hips and that big chest. And the fine hairs on his belly. Almost like little feathers." Her daughter had never seen a man without his clothes. "Is that wrong?"

"No, Titmouse. How dull if everyone were like you and me."

"Oh, I think it would be splendid to look like you. All red and ivory. But we need the men too. It's as if we were ships without sails."

"Or sails without ships. They support us, we guide them."

"Yes, that's much better. But the other children say it's wrong for a man to look on a woman without clothes, and worse the other way around. They say the Devil lurks in nakedness."

"Then they are ignorant and so are their parents. Sometimes I think that the Devil lurks in black homespun. In the old days, when England was almost as sunny as Italy, your own ancestors wore nothing except their plumage and their wings. The women were rather plain, on the whole. But the men—what a brilliance of feathers! Of course our wings have dwindled, and the plumage is gone from the females, and the men would rather be crucified than show the feathers on their backs. Still, there is nothing wrong with nakedness."

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They had met Robin again the afternoon of the Harvest Home. Aster had lost her bear, Scobble had found him, Robin had saved him—he and his young crippled friend, Nicholas. (How she had wanted to heal Nicholas' leg! She could, too; there were ancient skills for those who fell from the sky.)

"Mama," Aster had asked on the way home from the festival. "Would you like to have a new husband?"

"I don't know," she had said without thinking, or rather thinking of Robin.

"I know I would like a new father. The first one didn't wait around long enough for me to know him. I meant to lose Artor, you know. Actually, I prodded him toward the Festival. I knew the Vicar would lead the procession. But how are we going to trap him? I saw you give him the eye, but he won't know where to find us."

"I didn't give him the eye, I just thanked him. And we aren't going to trap him."

"We'll have to. He doesn't want a wife." Aster was a tiny child, like all Gubbing children; they had to be small to hatch from eggs. You might have taken her for six instead of nine. But she often spoke with the insights of a young woman.

"How do you know?"

"He has that wary look about him. He likes us but he doesn't quite trust us. Like a fine big stag sniffing the air for danger."

"What makes you think I want to marry again?"

"I know you don't want a lover. You like permanent things. Clavicytheriums and pewter and wassail bowls. Besides, you could have had your pick of the Gubbings. I realize you're a bit on the elderly side, but even the young ones fancy you. Why, Timothy said to me only yesterday, when his father was digging radishes, 'That mother of yours makes black look like scarlet. Sometimes I wish I were a Babylonian!' And he's only twelve." Next to those famous Biblical wives, Sarah and Ruth, Aster's favorite heroine —and apparently also Timothy's—was the whore of Babylon. "If you don't want a lover, you must want *something*. Or you wouldn't stand naked on the porch and look as if you'd forgotten you can't fly."

"I have all I need. I have you. I have Artor. And our mill is prettier than any cottage in Devon —except the Vicarage."

"And I have you, but I still want a father, and I'd trade the mill and live in a sod hut to get one!"

"Well, we aren't going to trap Robin Herrick."

"Can't we let him trap us?"

But there was no time. Judith and her friends had lured him into their own trap. Now she could only sit on a bench in the Tabernacle and watch his trial and wait for a chance to speak.

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She spoke like a queen.

Chapter VI

"MAMA, YOU WERE very brave. The way you stood up to that old witch, Judith."

Old witch. . . Judith was thirty, Stella's exact age.

"We haven't saved him yet, Titmouse. He must do the rest himself."

Judith was leading the congregation to the town square. Robin and Nicholas, directly behind her, were flanked by two men who flourished pikes and tried to look like Michael and Gabriel. The path was narrow and straight. Its shape was deliberate—the Gubbings never wrought without a lesson in mind—and Stella would have liked to line it with primroses and recall the birds, the reeves, the gotwits, the curlews, which had departed from Dartmoor with the first missionaries. In the old time, everyone had built a nest on his roof for any ancestral spirit who cared to return as a bird. But the new time was hostile to birds, particularly, it seemed, to Robins.

"But will he have a fair chance?"

"I hope so. Judith is just according to her lights."

"According to her shadows, you mean. I never liked her. She's jealous of you, Mama."

"As girls we were very close. As you know, she wanted to join me in Exeter. Her parents stopped her, though. My own—your grandparents—had long since been caught with their wings in London and burned as a witch and a warlock, so I was free to go where I chose. Perhaps Judith envies me what I found in Exeter."

"That's not the only reason."

"Perhaps also because my ancestress is mentioned in the Book of Redemption. If we still had kings and queens, I would be a queen and you would be a princess."

"What I'm getting at, Mama, is that she envies you your beauty."

"She needn't. She's really quite lovely, you know. There must be a touch of royalty in her veins. Bastardized, but still there. Her wings are larger than mine, and she hasn't any freckles. Or hadn't as a girl."

"It's the way you wear your beauty. You look naked even in black. If we saw her naked, I expect she would look dressed for church."

They had reached the square, the treeless, benchless, pathless place where petty sinners were locked into stocks ingeniously devised to accommodate hands, feet, and necks and to make their owners so exquisitely uncomfortable that, once they were liberated, a bench in the Tabernacle would feel like a velvet throne. The empty stocks, ranging in size to fit anyone from six to ninety, had a ravenous, ravening look, like

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wooden beasts with open mouths. It was not that there were no sinners in Dartmoor, but rather that the Gubbings were now so incensed by the sins of the King and his bishops ("tools of the Pope, that's what they are") that they had temporarily forgotten to watch each other for lesser sins.

If the stocks were an ugliness and affront, the water clock, so it seemed to Stella, was an abomination. Tall as a man, it was tarnished copper hammered into the shape of Christ on the cross. Every morning at dawn water was poured into an opening like a gash across his forehead. At precise one second intervals, a drop fell from either hand and plunked into the little pool, its bottom painted red, which submerged the foot of the cross in what seemed to be pallid blood. At dusk, when the cross was an inch deep in water, the pool was emptied for the night. The Romans had brought ingenious water clocks to Britain—gods, beasts, vegetables. The Gubbings had refined them to this particular ingenuity of horror.

There was a space behind the stocks and the clock for raising crucifixes.

The congregation, which had assembled with a silence approaching stealth for judgment in the Tabernacle, was now as clamorous as a field of crows surprised by a farmer. Stella waited for Judith to quiet them with one of her Gorgon stares, but Judith was staring at Robin and she did not look Gorgonian. He stood superbly pagan beside the pool; unshackled among that gaunt menagerie of stocks, which seemed too petty to threaten him.

"Mama, do you see how she looks at him? If it weren't Judith, I'd say she was giving him the eye. It's as if she likes him but won't admit it. She's never had a husband, has she?"

"No."

"A lover?" To Aster a lover was what the Whore of Babylon had enjoyed in abundance. A husband came to stay, a lover came and went. There was something to be said for lovers; you could change them as often as a town lady changed her gown. But only husbands made good fathers. Aster had made it clear that she expected her mother to catch a husband.

"Hush, Titmouse. She'll hear you and put you in the stocks. There's one for children, you know."

"I ought to know. I've been in it twice for falling asleep in the Tabernacle. No, she won't hear me. She's too busy looking at Robin. And his mannerly red-haired friend, Nicholas. I rather fancy the friend for myself. I've always liked older men. If Robin wins, I wonder if Nicholas will wait until I'm—nubile—is that the word? And will he expect a dowry? Perhaps we could part with our clavicytherium. Mama, you aren't listening. And I'm talk-

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ing about *husbands.*"

"I expect he'll wait. If Robin wins."

If Robin wins—Stella did not believe in the Christian God. She devoutly continued to worship the woodpecker god Picus, who, however, was warrior more than bard and had never been worshipped for inspiring poets. Robin must depend on his own abilities as a poet, which were considerable, but also on how Judith judged them. If she rejected a single line, a single rhyme, he would lose the contest. She is usually fair, even if harsh, thought Stella. But I can remember her as a girl like me, ardent and hopeful. I found a husband, she found a congregation. If she has regrets—well, Puritans often reject what most attracts them.

Robin smiled to her. She saw his lips move in a silent "Thank you, Stella."

Her wings stirred at her shoulders. She felt an urge to fly, to sing, to— But this was not the time to flutter in her emotions. Her brain must be as sharp as her hearing. In such a trial, a rhyme might be questioned, a meter might seem to limp, and she must be ready to defend him against the congregation. She knew the extent of her power. Some of the men disliked her because she had rebuffed them. Most of the women envied her because she had married a sailor. But she had, after all, an ancestress who had been a queen in the Book of Redemption. The re-writers, the vampirizers had somehow missed that charming tale of how the original Stella, before her people had lost the power of flight, had spied a young Roman about to be sacrificed at Stonehenge, snatched him into the air and, after a suitable courtship, into matrimony. "And her love was so great that her wings stood tall like flames. . . ." (It was doubtless the matrimony which had protected the tale from the censors. Indeed, it was a pleasing conclusion.) So—let them desire and resent her; let them envy her. But only she was a queen, and a hundred black surplices, a church like a crucifix, could not dissemble the fact that her people grievously lamented the loss of flight, of the old guiltless time when women had been heroines instead of judges.

"It is for me to choose the subject of our poem." At least for the moment Judith had conquered her stare, recovered her eloence. She was both accuser and judge. "I choose the subject of—repentance."

By the bill of the Woodpecker God, thought Stella (Philip had taught her to swear). How typical of the woman! She has never ceased to repent the fact that she did not go to Exeter with me. Robin, on the other hand, has nothing to repent except the lack of a wife (vicars ought to be married. They need a cook in the house. Otherwise, it's all beef and no

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vegetables. They need a mate in the bed. Otherwise, they settle for sluts like Julia and Corinna).

"Repentance and absolution. They seem unusually appropriate to our Vicar. The first he must learn; the second he may only hope for. I have entitled the poem 'His Prayer for Absolution,' and I propose a length of ten lines."

A susurration of approval. An apt subject, an accurate title, a length which should not overtax the combatants or weary the listeners. Robin looked as if he had been asked to recite the Book of Leviticus. His devotional poems were far outnumbered by his secular poems, and he was known to write badly on the subject of sin. Never once had he mentioned Hell in his sermons, and only in his poems as an afterthought.

"Master Herrick, does the subject meet with your approval?"

"If it didn't, would it matter? Suppose I suggested Christ in the manger or grace for a child or. . . ."

"Don't try to sway us with your well-known honeyed sentiments. We too are lovers of children. 'Suffer the little children to come unto me.' We too hallow the infancy of our Lord. But the dignity—might I say the finality—of the occasion demands a subject of greater seriousness. We have agreed then on my choice?"

"Agreed," said Robin.

"No," said Nicholas.

"What did you say?"

"*No.*"

"And have you a better suggestion, dear boy?"

"Harvest Home or Yule logs or Candlemasse Eve. Robin writes beautifully on such subjects."

"Sublimity, not beauty, is our object here."

Robin smiled. "I will try my best to be sublime."

Judith stared at his bare legs, splendid in the sun; his bar arms, muscled like those of a blacksmith; the archangel hair above the Faun face. Then, for the second time in the space of an hour, she lost her tongue. To Stella she looked like nothing so much as a love-sick cow; to her congregation she must have looked as if she were awaiting a sign from on high.

"*It is for you to begin,* Mistress, Judith," said the Cobbler respectfully. "We have all approved your choice."

She bowed her head in humble assent, as if the Holy Ghost had suggested the subject. Abruptly, triumphantly, she raised her head and flung the first line like a gauntlet:

"For these my unbaptizéd rhymes. . . ."

Unbaptized rhymes. . . As if the Devil had inspired them instead of God. She was calling on Herrick to disavow his secular poems, his love pieces, his naughty epigrams, his celebrations of feasting and drinking—in short, the essence of his art. In

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five seconds he must match her meter and find a rhyme-word for 'rhymes' and advance the poem toward completion in ten lines.

He frowned and lowered his head. One drop fell into the pool. Two.

(Picus, how can he think at such a time? But he has to think. To save two lives, he has to rhyme a lie.)

"Writ in my wild unhallowed times. . . ."

Judith nodded approval. The quick confession evidently pleased her. She chose her next words carefully. As the accuser, she was under no limit of five seconds.

"For every sentence, clause and word. . . ."

Inferior poetry. Like one of her hymns, smooth but wooden.

This time he groped and stammered before he found a rhyme:

"That's not inlaid with Thee —with Thee—"

Stella's wings began to wilt at her shoulders. She counted seconds. Two. . .three. . .four. . .

"That's not inlaid with Thee, *my Lord*. . . ."

"An imperfect rhyme." It was the seamstress. "'Word' and 'Lord.' You, Mistress Judith, would never permit such clumsiness in your hymns. It's as if I had dropped a stitch."

Judith looked from the Seamstress to Robin, who met her stare with neither a smile nor a plea; almost, in fact, with a dare. He reminded Stella of Philip when he was dying of the Plague. He did not want to die, but he did not grovel for life. ("Stella, I wasn't made to play the harp. Do sailors and witches end in the same infernal tavern?")

"Let it pass. This once." Then, rapidly—

"Forgive me God, and blot each line. . . ."

And Robin:

"Out of my Book, that is not thine. . . ."

And Judith:

"But if, 'mongst all, thou find'st one. . . ."

Mother Goose, what a line! It was worse than wooden, it lumbered. But "one," at least, was easy to rhyme: "son," "done," "fun" (no, not in a Puritan poem).

"Worthy thy Benediction. . . ." Robin carefully divided the word into its five syllables to emphasize the last, rhyming "un." A boldness, even a license, but original and allowable. There was no dissent.

"That One of all the rest, shall be. . . ."

"The Glory of my work, and me."

Ten lines, a finished if not quite a perfect poem. But the imperfections belonged chiefly to Judith.

And Judith was fair. If she could not recognize her own limitations as a poet, at least she must recognize the excellence of Robert Herrick. She graced the congregation with what Stella called her Madonna smile. (It meant that she was not sure if she would rather crucify a man or make love

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to him.)

"He has passed his Trial by Rhyme. He has saved his life and that of his friend. It is, however, unthinkable that we should allow him to return to Dean Church with his knowledge of our town. He must remain our prisoner."

Stella loosened Aster's hand. "Judith, is it not true that Master Herrick was lured here by a little girl whom he mistook—was meant to mistake—for my own Aster? And that you identified yourself as me in order to lure him from his horse?"

"It is true. Our good Cobbler attended the Harvest Home to note the behaviour of the Vicar. He reported to us the curious incident involving your bear. We knew that Herrick had met you, drunk with you, learned your name and that of your daughter."

"In other words, you deceived him, and used my name and Aster's in your deceit."

"Again yes. My namesake, Judith, deceived Holofernes in order to behead him in the name of the Lord. God may approve a strategem to deal with his enemies."

"Robert Herrick has just proved that he is not God's enemy."

"I have told you why he must stay with us here in Dartmoor. What are you suggesting, Stella?"

It was unsettling to hear her name spoken by a woman who had once been her friend—with familiarity but not with friendliness. Could a generous girl grow altogether into a hard woman in eleven years? Or did that same young girl hide somewhere in the bell tower of the woman's mind, peeping through a window, peering down a ladder?

"That he and Nicholas be placed in the custody of those whose names were used to lead him here. That they become my prisoners. The mill has ground no flour for many years, and not one of you can set its machinery aright." (Actually, since occupying the mill, she had not allowed them to try; in order to reach the machinery, they must pass through her houseplace and spy her forbidden luxuries.) "I will put them to work as millers. Then you can forget your hand-mills and devote more time to growing beets and radishes."

"They have only to flee across the moors to Dean Church."

"Aster and I will stand surety for them."

"I recall, Stella, that you yourself once forsook us and sought a husband in that sailors' brothel known as Exeter."

She resisted the urge to say: And you would have joined me if your father had not discovered your plans and locked you in the stocks. She said: "And I returned as a widow to prove my loyalty by nine years in which I have outworked every woman in Dartmoor. Weaving. Gardening. Sewing. Who sewed the robe you're wearing?"

"You did."

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"Is it well sewn?"

"It will pass. As long as our dear Seamstress must sew for the people of Dean Church."

"Did I not grow the largest pumpkins in Dartmoor last year?

"Size is not always a measure of excellence. But yes, you did."

"When I left Dartmoor as a girl, I broke no rule. Nothing in the Scriptures or the Book of Redemption forbids us to visit the world beyond these tors. Our "dear Seamstress" rarely visits us here in Dartmoor. The Miller and his wife—how often do they grace our Tabernacle? You yourself have been to London."

"On God's work."

"And I lived a godly life in Exeter. I was wed, I bore a child. It is true that the man of my choice was not then a Puritan, but it was in my heart to make him one and bring him back with me to Dartmoor. I showed him my wings before we were wed—at the risk of seeming a witch—and told him my purpose. One more voyage, he said. But before the voyage he died of the Plague." (By the crest of Picus, by the eggs of Mother Goose, may Philip's ghost not hear me. No, let him hear! It will give him a laugh in his celestial tavern.)

"I don't question your integrity, Stella. I question the propriety of your sharing a mill with a man who is not your husband and a boy who is not your son."

"Very well. They shall sleep beneath the mill. I shall be the miller, and he and Nicholas shall be my apprentices. Where else do apprentices sleep? Do you suggest that I am prompted by carnal longings? An injustice has been done to a man and a boy *in my name*. As you say, they must remain our prisoners. But allow me to atone for the anguish we have caused them. I will give them shelter and gainful employment. I will do my best to convert them to our ways. And with their help I will bake you the best bread this side of London!"

The Gubbings enjoyed few niceties at the table; they were poor farmers and impossible bakers; and their usual fare was heavy clap bread which would offend an undiscriminating pig. Stella's offer was greeted by a unanimity of approval. The Cobbler clapped his hands. More time for him in which to mend soles! The Seamstress clucked with pleased expectancy. More time for her in which to sew!

"Master Herrick, what do you think of this scheme proposed by your benefactress?"

"When I was a boy, I visited my uncle in a Charnwood Forest. There was a mill on his land. I worked it for a whole summer. Yes, Nicholas and I will gladly go with Mistress Stella. And we thank you for your justice."

"Go with her then—with our blessing. But go no further."

Stella assumed a dutiful mask. "Come, Master Herrick. Come, Nicholas. There is rust to scrape.

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Flour to be ground. Bread to be baked."

"See that you bake well, Stella."

When she turned her back, Stella felt Judith's stare like a scorpion on her wings and remembered the girl who had wanted to go to Exeter. ("Stella, will we really find husbands? I want a sailor with golden hair and arms as thick as the masts on a brigantine!")

Now Judith had two grievances against her.

—to be concluded—

—THOMAS BURNETT SWANN

Fantasy Books (continued from page 74)

acceptable as long as the actors seem wholly to believe in them.

Avoid camp like poison. This form of humor, a favorite of the gay community, gets out of hand all too easily and can vitiate anything.

Avoid the natural consequences of violence, such as extreme pain, uninhibited terror, and underscored death. In short, put silencers on the cameras as well as on the guns. (Corollary: *Play it cool and with style.* In this instance a style reminiscent of Diana Rigg and Patrick McNee in *The Avengers.*)

Make the heroic heshe wholly noble. It is odd to find Wonder Woman (Cathy Lee Crosby) and her technically evil sister Ahnjayla (Anitra Ford) behaving in a duel more like Samurai than the Japanese in *Lightning Swords of Death,* the current dismal, brutal samurai-exploitation film. But it is so.

Make the villainous heshe at least likeable, for they'll be coming back, hopefully with Ricardo Montalban still among them.

The Exorcist has been discussed to death. I think it's an effective pseudo-documentary—what a genuine case of possession and exorcism would be like, if there ever were such a case, rather than a straight fiction, like the otherwise comparable *Rosemary's Baby.* The film's power to frighten is augmented, I believe, by the artistically extrinsic circumstance that the film has the tacit Seal of Approval of the Roman Catholic Church—priests among the actors, not warning the faithful against it, etc. One is impressed, even against one's will, by the testimony of experts. I wasn't scared while I watched it, being too closely attentive to the special effects (adequate) and the sound track (superb), but late that night I had a delayed reaction. Next day I got some white chalk and inscribed pentacles on every door (not forgetting a transome) and the sill of every window in my bed-and-bath. I don't believe a bit in such superstitious nonsense, but why take chances?

—FRITZ LEIBER

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Editorial (continued from page 4)

erage of 600 such manuscripts a month. I usually culled anywhere from half a dozen to a dozen stories from that 600, and these were passed on to the editor (Avram Davidson in 1963; Ed Ferman later) who purchased one or two.

Most of the "slush pile" stories were terrible. They were written by people who had little knowledge of the craft of writing and rarely had anything to say. All too many of those stories are typified to me in retrospect by one I read in which a henpecked middle-aged husband worked in his basement to perfect a time machine. Once it was working, he lured his dominating and viciously unpleasant wife down to his basement and sent her back in time, presumably to be devoured by dinosaurs.

It was a thorougly ugly little story, unredeemed by any flash of insight or style. It reminded me a lot of the stories EC comics used to run, in which it was taken for granted that husbands and wives were always plotting murder against each other. It seemed entirely too typical of the lack of imagination all too many would-be authors brought to their "slush pile" stories. What an ignoble use for an invention as cosmic as a time-travelling machine! How mean, how small, how limited!

Reading these stories dulled my mind for a time—a problem Grant Carrington tells me he too has suffered in reading our "slush"—so that when I found a story a bit less bad than its fellows it looked very good indeed. No doubt I sent a number of wretched stories on to Avram in my first few months with *F&SF*, simply because they contrasted so favorably with the rest.

But then I began finding some genuinely *good* stories. Rarely more than one or two a month, but stories good enough to buy, stories which shone like rays of sunshine from out of the overcast gloom of the "slush pile".

The first such was called "Who Fished Up The Murex?" or a title close to that, and it was written by a man then totally unknown to me —Thomas Burnett Swann.

It was a stunningly beautiful story. Set in times of classical myth, it concerned a human girl and a family of ant-boys, who lived and thought as one (if my memory is not fudging over the details at this late date). Ultimately she "marries" and lives with them all. It was a refreshing approach and a delightful story, written in finely crafted prose. Who *was* this fellow Swann? I wondered. I passed his story along to Avram with a glowing note. It was by far the best story I'd yet found, and was to remain a landmark of high quality for months to come.

You say you don't remember seeing that story in *F&SF*? You're right. Through a series of unfortunate errors, it slipped through our hands and ended up in the British *Science-Fantasy*, a magazine, I subsequently learned, which had already published half a dozen of Swann's earliest stories. As it turned out *F&SF* was not to publish its first Swann story for another two or three years—by which time his manuscripts were no longer relegated to the "slush pile," and were not my province.

Reading that story, though, had a profound impact upon me. I raved about Swann in the fanzines I then wrote columns for, and became part of a small-but-growing coterie of Swann devotees.

In the years which have passed

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since 1963 Thomas Burnett Swann has become better known to the field at large. Ace Books issued several of his novels and story collections, and he has appeared on several occasions within the pages of *F&SF*.

A few years ago he sent me a novel for this magazine, but we discovered to our chagrin that Ace, which had bought it for book publication, has also purchased pre-book-publication rights and refused a magazine sale. Thus it has taken until now for us to get together on a work of his.

"Will-O-The-Wisp" was a pleasure to read and a delight for me to publish. It is one of Swann's stronger works, one in which the darker sides of man's conflict with non-humans living among men is explored. It is also Thomas Burnett Swann's first appearance in FANTASTIC—and one long overdue.

UNSOLICITED SUBMISSIONS: Five years of reading "the slush pile" for *F&SF* burned me out. These days the "slush" is read for me by one of our assistant editors or Associate Editor Grant Carrington. But recently I've been made aware of a disquieting circumstance. A letter from one disgruntled would-be author and personal queries from several people who approached me at a recent east-coast sf convention underline a significant point: If you want your story to be read, considered, and if rejected—returned with our "checklist" rejection-slip, please address your manuscripts to our Falls Church address—Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046. When submissions are sent to the Publisher's address they are, first of all, held until a boxfull is accumulated and then sent down to us, which adds as much as a month or more to the time involved before we can report to you on your story. Additionally, they may be read and returned by a staff member in New York City whose rejection slips say only "Sorry", and who has been known to pen caustic notes over my initials, despite my objections to this practice.

Grant Carrington, who has at times a statistical frame of mind, recently began keeping records on *where* "slush pile" stories were coming from. The following are his figures.

The bulk of the manuscripts come from the United States, but a significant minority have come from outside the U.S. Out of 644 submissions, 28 came from Canada, for example; five from Europe, six from Australia, one from China, one from New Zealand, and one from Africa.

Of those from the U.S., California contributed the most—103—with New York in second place with 70, and Pennsylvania third with 34. Other states with significant representation in our "slush pile" are: Illinois (24), Massachusetts (27), Michigan (26), New Jersey (21), Ohio (23), and Texas (32).

On a geographical basis, it breaks down like this:

We received the largest number of manuscripts from the Northeast (183), and the second largest from the West Coast (including Alaska and Hawaii) (133). The North Central area contributed 95, followed by the Southwest (55), Mid-Atlantic (45), South (44), Midwest (29), and Rockies (19).

In general, these figures tend to bear out both the sales patterns of our magazines and the concentration of sf fans and readers in the general population.

UPCOMING: Ova Hamlet returns next issue with "Grebzlam's Game."

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Richard A. Lupoff, whose alter-ego Ova is, writes:

"You don't have to believe this if you don't want to but night before last I couldn't fall asleep and kept twitching and writhing and finally decided to get out of bed and miscalculated and slipped as I got out of bed and *wham*! blasted my forehead on the top of the night table.

"As I slumped back onto the mattress my mind was suddenly filled with images of Malzbergian enlightenment.

"It was *satori*.

"And the result was the new and long awaited Ova Hamlet opus, 'Grebzlam's Game.'

"I think you will enjoy it, and I hope that the loyal readers of FANTASTIC will welcome the return of Ms. Hamlet."

Lupoff also mentions in the same letter that "One of these days I will be assembling a short story collection, to be called *Empty Calories for the Mind*, and will surely include some of the Hamlet *oeuvre*, maybe all of them."

Also upcoming, probably in our January, 1975, issue, will be the fourth and final Conan novelette, "Shadows in the Skull," by L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter. Like the three previous Conan stories published here (August, 1972; July, 1973; July, 1974—and all available from the Publisher, if you missed them), it is destined for book publication as *Conan of Acquilonia*, and would in fact be in print in that form now had Lancer Books not ceased activity last year. Well, Lancer's loss is our gain, in this instance. Sprague and Lin tell me that next in line will be the final Conan novel, and with good fortune you'll be reading it first in these pages some time next year. In the meantime, Lin's Thongor story, this issue, should give some momentary satisfaction to your hunger for sword & sorcery adventures.

All told, it looks like our 24th year will be an exciting one!

—TED WHITE

ON SALE IN OCTOBER AMAZING (Aug. 27th) The conclusion of **THE DOMAINS OF KORYPHON** by **JACK VANCE**, **THE SUN'S TEARS** by **BRIAN M. STABLEFORD**, **STELLA BLUE** by **GRANT CARRINGTON**, **DOWNFALL** by **JEFF JONES**, **REQUIEM FOR APOLLO**; **LIKE THE SUN IN SPLENDOR** by **SANDRA MIESEL**, **SPACE THROUGH OUR FINGERS** by **JACK C. HALDEMAN II**, and many new features.

ON SALE NOW IN SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES THE MACHINE THAT SAVED THE WORLD by **HUGO AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, MURRAY LEINSTER**, plus **INTERSTELLAR FLIGHT** by **BEN BOVA**, **THE SMART ONES** by **JACK SHARKEY**, **SAVAGE WIND** by **HARLAN ELLISON**, **HOMESTEAD ON VENUS** by **LESTER DEL REY**, **SMALL MIRACLE** by **RANDALL GARRETT**, **THE NURSERY COMMANDOS** by **ADAM CHASE**, **THINK YOURSELF TO DEATH** by **C.H. THAMES**, and **WORLDS AT WAR** by **ED EARL REPP**.

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...According to You

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, *Box, 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046*

Dear Ted:

I have just finished reading the May issue of FANTASTIC and heartily disliked. But then again I heartily dislike all science fiction and fantasy. In my lifetime I've spent about $10.00 on science fiction and fantasy books and magazines and have been bored to death by every one. Just what is supposed to be so great about the stuff anyway? It seems to be a great waste of time to me. I have tried to force myself to like it but have been unable to do so.

I really enjoyed the magazine except for the stories. The editorial was particularly interesting I thought. I have a place in my heart for all fiction magazines, no matter what kind. I particularly like all mystery magazines, but besides being interested in the production of it, I care nothing for the stories in your and your competitors' magazines.

Thanks for your time.

DANNY MCINTIRE
Rt #2
Bethel Springs, Tenn. 38315

I don't believe I've ever received a letter like yours before, Danny. You're obviously wasting your time and money on us–but I hope the publication of your letter here will spur you to spend another six bits before quitting us for good.—TW

Dear Ted,

Brian Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound* was a tour-de-force of good writing. It would have been much better, however, if Aldiss had chosen to re-examine the morality of the Frankenstein myth—rather than perpetuate the unjustified conventional interpretation.

Keep in mind that Mary Shelley did not, in her story, explicate a moral interpretation of Frenkenstein's actions. Moral issues were touched upon, but only in dialogues between Frankenstein and his creature, never being really resolved. It is the reader's responsibility to infer such an interpretation from the evidence of the plot.

Hastily generalizing, convention inferred that, since *one* man's creation turned back upon him, this is true of *all* attempts to create something new out of nature. With this false generalization given dramatic force by Shelley's novel (not to mention the mindless films it inspired) the Frankenstein image has been invoked as a symbol of modern technology.

Now, there is just enough evidence for this metaphor to sustain its popular acceptance; in just enough cases,

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the consequences of a growing technology seem counter-intuitive and self-destructive. But to stop at this point is to distort the truth, for the consequences of technology have brought a real and substantial progress to the world, despite the setbacks and blemishes. Furthermore, the Frankenstein metaphor implies malevolence to be *inherent* in technological advance—which is a gross injustice. Technology, of itself, is neither malevolent nor benevolent. What really is at stake is the use to which *men* put it. And men may choose good or evil, wisdom or stupidity. Blame not the tool for the craftsman's mistake.

The sore point is that this metaphor of the inherent malevolence of technology is not even substantiated by *Frankenstein* itself!

If one examines the story critically, a wholly new metaphor emerges: Frankenstein creates a paragon of humanity—precocious, benevolent, rational, and brimming with the innocent curiosity of a child, eager to learn and to love. No honest person could claim that malice was inherent in the creature's natural emotions. But what does Frankenstein do? Instead of caring for and educating the creature, he abandons it out of an irrational abhorrence. Left to its own ignorance, the creature finds nothing but abuse in human society, and is driven to forage in the wilderness. Assailed on all sides by the cruelty, hatred, and injustice of humanity, it vows vengeance on those who (at large) have so wronged it.

The point is not that the creature did evil deeds, but that Frankenstein had it in his power to influence his creature to do good deeds—*and chose not to.*

If any moral is to be taken from *Frankenstein*, it should not be the bankrupt one of "unhallowed" technology breeding self-destruction. Rather, it should be the reminder that a creator shapes the virtue of his creations, and that his greatest peril is the abdication of this responsibility.

The greatest of literary injustices has been to identify Frankenstein's creature as a monster—when it was actually the *victim* of a monster: Frankenstein himself. Sadly, no one seems to hear the undertone of moral superiority in the creature's declaration: "You are my creator, but I am your master. Obey!"

MIKE DUNN
B.Sc., M.Sc, Aeronautics & Astronautics
5600 University Way NE
Seattle, Washington

Frankenstein Unbound *provoked a good deal of mail–more so than any work of fiction we've published recently–of which the letters which follow are only a sampling.*—TW

Dear Ted,

I held off commenting on the May '74 ish until I had read Brian Aldiss' *Frankenstein Unbound.* Well, now I have so here I go.

Your editorial was interesting. Give us more on the inside workings of an sf magazine, I found your words on the Art Department very fascinating. It's always nice to stray away from political mutterings once in a while. Keep it up.

My first thought upon reading *Frankenstein Unbound* was that it certainly did belong in FANTASTIC. Although it has traces of science fiction (the timeslips) the novel with its world of Mary Shelley and her characters co-existing made it fantasy. I was thinking ahead to myself saying that Mary Shelley had heard of Fran-

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kenstein and his creature and had written it up, perhaps neglecting to mention that her work was based on fact. But no, that wasn't so, she was correctly writing it as based on a dream she had, little realizing that he did exist. Aldiss failed to give an explanation for the coincidence—but small matter— it gave the novel more of a feel of mystery and unreality. The conflict between religion and science—the heart and the brain —was well thought out although I tend to side with science. I've heard that religion has many times attempted to block mankind's progress by proclaiming that there are certain areas that mortal man cannot go. Maybe so. Frankenstein may have blasphimed in trying to correct and create life, but who is to say? All versions, both book and film, have had him creating a monster with a brain of a killer or a lunatic. . .why not the brain of a learned man? I have always wondered why nobody has ever had the brain attempting any reflections on its first life. Say it came from a recently fresh corpse, wouldn't it try to seek out its relatives or friends that it knew in life? Getting back to the question of science and religion, both could co-exist for the good of all, but sadly one always tries to dominate the other and so more harm than good is done in the long run.

Other thoughts on *Frankenstein Unbound* was the mating dance of the creatures—it had an eerie effect on me as I read it. The ending, though good was predictable, the beings had to die while our hero was awaiting rescue. All in all a marvelous reading experience.

RAYMOND J. BOWIE JR.
31 Everett Avenue
Somerville, Mass. 02145

Dear Ted:

The May editorial was illuminating indeed. Congratulations on a great cover layout for that issue. Ridge's cover, however, was not my idea of great art. The March cover was more to my liking. You might work on your publisher, though. Putting all stories and authors on the cover does make it look rather cluttered.

I was unable to judge Aldiss' story objectively because of his having placed the hero in Texas. Texans do not talk that way whether resident in Texas or time hopping. Now if Bodenland had been from Devon. . . . I was a little surprised that you as editor would not have balked at "Let's have a walk round, Grampy, can we?" (p. 14, 2d column, March issue). Can you imagine Lyndon Johnson (as a random example of a well known Texan) having grandchildren growing up on his ranch talking that way? I'm not saying that if an author wants to write about a certain place he must do a linguistic analysis first; but some things are just a little hard to take and make the story that much less credible.

Your attempts to upgrade FANTASTIC and AMAZING are certainly not in vain. Keep up the good work.

DAVID E. MARCUS
1702 East Albreda Street
Carson, CA. 90745

You raise a good point–and one which troubled me as I copyedited the novel for its publication here. The problem is that the voice throughout is not one of a Texan–or even that of an American. To "correct" this would have required a massive job of rewriting, and such is not my policy, especially when dealing with the work of a major author (and a work which was already in print in Great Britain in book form). Thus I left intact all

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"Britishisms" save those which are considered ungramatical here (such as the confusion of "has" and "have", which are used in British English in a manner directly opposite to their use here).—TW

Dear Ted,

I am not a regular reader of FANTISTIC but what issues I have read I have enjoyed. And I do not usually write to publications expressing my views; as a matter of fact, this is the first time. But I was inspired by the May issue to do so.

To begin at the beginning, I thought the cover illustration was dumb. That's the only word for it: dumb. And very cliché. The figures of the snake and woman were all out of proportion, which is perfectly alright in some cases, I suppose, but in the case of an obviously realistically-oriented painting it's just plain irritating. And why would a woman wearing a headpiece with a snake on it, implying a member of some kind of snake cult, be afraid of a snake? But I suppose that someone with so small a cranium wouldn't think of that. No matter. There were certainly some redeeming qualities; the background was quite fascinating and, in a layman's opinion very well done. And the general layout was quite a bit better than many I've seen elsewhere.

Superficially, what bothered me most about the interior of the magazine was the impression that something was wrong with my eyes. After reading along merrily for a few pages I suddenly discovered I was suffering from double-vision. It was quite disconcerting. But after more thorough scrutiny I realized that it was the type, not my eyes, that was suffering. I'm sure it was as disquieting to you as it was to me,—but thought I would mention it in passing.

I was a little disappointed in the short stories, which I look forward to the most, being a short sf story addict. On the whole they seemed rather shallow and underdeveloped, although I did enjoy "In the Land that Aimed at Forever" by David R. Bunch, and "Soundtrack: The Making of a Thoroughbred" by Robert Thurston. But the general quality did not seem equal to that of the short story sections I've read in past issues.

But on to bigger and better things: *Frankenstein Unbound*. If it had been the only piece of writing in the last two issues, I feel my money would still have been more than well spent. It was well-written, perceptive, and thought-provoking. I read the original *Frankenstein* sometime ago and felt I was missing a lot, especially since I had no real understanding of the times in which it was written, or its application to our own times, which was obviously there but flitting teasingly just beyond the limits of my intellectual vision. Now it is all much clearer and more firmly in my grasp. I do not mean that the Brian Aldiss novel was merely a more obvious reiteration of Mary Shelley's; it certainly was not! But it did pose many questions and hypotheses, the resolutions of which shed light on aspects of both novels. For instance, the subtitle of *Frankenstein* particularly bothered me for a long time (after all, wasn't Prometheus a benefactor of mankind, Frankenstein a malefactor?) but now that is much clearer. I am considering rereading *Frankenstein*, thanks to Brian Aldiss.

And as a story complete unto itself it was immensely entertaining and absorbing. It was well enough developed and written to be appreciated

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without any background knowledge of the story on which it is more or less based, and that is a crucial test for a novel of this sort. The only criticism I have is that it was rather sluggish and verbose in parts, but I do not remember ever having read a novel that was not. I think that these are faults inherent in the form, particularly evident to someone who reads short stories almost exclusively, and as such, extremely minor faults that do not seriously detract from the general quality. It was a great story.

I would also like to comment on some of the views expressed in the letters section of the May issue. I must second your reply to Lester Boutillier, indirectly regarding Harlan Ellison, via Susan Doenim. I have not read her story, "Timmy Was Eight", so I cannot speak for that, but being an avid Ellison reader I must say that it has never been my impression that he makes a "big deal" or tries to be shocking over sex itself. I think rather that sex is often used (and very effectively, too) to express the attitudes or mental, emotional, or spiritual states of the characters or cultures he is describing, and, as such, a legitimate and integral part of his stories.

I also agree with your reply to Amos Salmonson, but would like to add a corollary of my own. I too believe that analyzing a fictional character as if he were a real person is invalid, but I do think that "to bring them back to 'the real world' " is not without value. To be sure, the "minds" of fictional characters are incomplete, being as they are the creations of minds that do not even completely understand themselves or the "real world", but they are, they must be, some sort of reflection of the people who created them, and therein lies their value. They offer us fractional, incomplete, but valid insights into the workings of these psyches, and our own reactions to them can help us gain insight into our own.

All in all, the May issue was very interesting and entertaining. If the next issue is as good, I'm hooked.

LINDA FERRAZZARA
2523-Second Ave: S.
Minneapolis, Minn. 55405

Dear Mr. White:

I have just received the May Fantastic, about two days ago. I guess the first place to start is the beginning —the cover. It was poor compared to most of the covers you've had in the last few years and isn't very good compared to your competitors' covers either, for a change. The background was fair, but the central figure was down right poor.

I enjoyed your editorial; although I'm not a potential artist I found it interesting and quite informative. Point in fact, I've always had the impression that you've had pretty much complete control of the contents of an issue. I was unaware that the publisher determined the order of stories in an issue or that he was in charge of the format of the title page of the stories. I have also been blaming you for the continuations.

The best thing I can say about Leiber's book review column for this issue is that it was only three pages. He must have been in a hurry to finish.

The Letter Column. There was a good bunch this time. It was nice to see a reader writing to from Brasil no less. With the low circulation you have and the poor distribution it seems odd that you keep coming up with readers in foreign countries. I can recall, off hand, seeing letters from readers in England and Australia

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on other occasions.

In brief reference to references about your name sakes, count yourself lucky you aren't an insurance salesman named John Smith.

Oh boy, now here I am with the letter from one David Taggart. I've only one point to comment upon in his letter and that is on the Bunch story. Anyone who looks at a story as a filler is going to get just what they are looking for. I'm not a Bunch fan, in fact I can only think of three of his stories that I've ever liked and "Alien" was one of them. It is in fact my favorite Bunch story and I consider one of the best short-shorts by anyone in years. If I had gone into it regarding it as a filler I'd probably have skimmed over it and come up with a similar feeling. However, I never look at a story that way. If it turns up in a professional magazine I assume it is good, until reading it persuades me otherwise—which several stories in this issue did.

I would now like to offer a comment on your exchange with Amos Salmonson—whom I'm sure most readers recognize as the editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Terror*. I don't wish to offend either of you, but I don't think either of you know what the other is talking about and you are having trouble figuring out where the difference is. It isn't really commentary & criticism which are bumping heads, it's subject matter that is raising the difference. You are talking science fiction while Mr. Salmonson is talking fantasy, pure unadulterated—a poor term with today's standards—fantasy.

While talking about *Star Trek* you are in the area of science fiction. Science fiction is supposed to maintain a position that what it puts down could happen someday. That it is possible. Its principles should be real and if there are flaws in those basic principles any "real criticism" should take them to task. However, don't expect that criticism to deter the enjoyment we *Star Trek* fans get from it. Back on the track, Mr. Salmonson's comments were on fantasy, which makes no such pretentions toward the possible. It is therefore impossible to criticise on a basis it never had made any claims at. It's like criticising a lawyer for not being able to perform brain surgery. Fantasy, when labeled as such and not masquerading as something else, must be treated—evaluated—*criticised* on its own terms.

You can't criticise something for not being real, when it never claimed nor was supposed to be real—in either fact or bassis. You most certainly accept fantasy stories and characters as being as real as you would any story or character in the mainstream. The "commentary" you spoke of is the *only* valid method of criticism of fantasy. As was said of "Lord Of the Rings", it is beyond technical evaluation because mainly, it has no base on which to meet such an evaluation and it was not intended to.

I guess I've made my point, or as close to it as possible. Either it is apparent by now and you conceed it or you think me a fool, in either case any more exposition will serve no purpose.

On to Lester Boutillier's letter. I have often agreed with many things Mr. Boutillier has said in the past. I have often felt, from reading your letter column, that I'm the only one who agrees with much of anything he has said. I'm sure though, that there are others who have written you in agreement with his remarks, but that simply for one reason or another they never saw print. I now find myself on

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the other side of the Boutillier question—a different one though—in the manner of his last letter. His remark that there was no sf in the issue was absurd—as well as "Network" which you mentioned, I considered "The Interview" to be sf with "Heartburn" as marginal, given hypnotical induced amnesia and elaborate sets it could even fall into mainstream non-f-or-s.f.—and even if there wasn't any sf in this one issue, that doesn't justify the dropping of science-fiction from the logo; there are other issues. I find myself agreeing with his rating of "Alien" and "Network" however that idiotic bit about guessing the surprise ending in the first paragraph of the last section. [*sic*] That last section was only a little better than half a column long so big deal if you got it a-little early—which you didn't. If the anxiety of the first Interviewer didn't tell you something before that, you have a problem. It wasn't the main point of the story anyway, it was just used to accent the situation.

As for "Heartburn In Heaven" despite what Mr. Boutillier said about her failure to shock—the intent of which I failed to find—it seems that he *was* shook, if not indeed shocked, at least enough to ignore the rest of the content of the story.

That leads me to the fiction in the May issue. "Frankenstein Unbound" was brilliant and having broken my policy and reading the first half of John Brunner's "Total Eclipse" is it too early to talk about placing 1 & 2 in the Hugoes in 1975? They are both brilliant. I wish I could say the same for the shorter pieces in the May issue. It would seem as if you were trying to prove an earlier point about short stories being the weakest form.

You sure got a weak batch this time. The Robert Thurston story was good compared to the rest, but it wasn't much. "Nice and Easy" was nice and nothing. If listing what was wrong with it, it would be quicker to list *everything* right with it. The most interesting thing in it was the main character getting swallowed up in mid ejaculation and I don't care for that kind of thing in stories, but for the quality of the rest, it would have been a good place to stop. It was silly in some parts, stupid in others. I have one correction for your introduction of him: "We've heard too *much* from Pg Wyal in recent years". The best part of that story was the illustration.

"The Dreaming Dervish" wasn't much better and it didn't have the saving grace of a decent illustration. The little sequence on "Oafed out" was the best thing in the story. At least it was a bit shorter than the Wyal Travesty. The style would have been better off sitting up on top of a telephone pole and the content couldn't have filled a table spoon. The water was poison! Ipps! Hell that thing should have been shot and put out of its misery. Let the Dervish dream an eternal dream.

The new Rotsler story gives the impression that he owed you a favor so while taking a bath one night he scrawled out a story and sent it to you. It was a nothing, but at least it was a little nothing.

The Bunch story was settling. I was afraid he was ill after I had read his "Alien" and found it good. Nice to see him back to his old standard of poor stories.

"War Baby" wasn't bad, in fact by the time I got to it, it seemed great. It was the best short in the issue, but what the hell is the author's name Al Sirois like it says on the contents & title page or Lewis S. Allyn like it

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says on the cover and at the end of the story?

"Metamorphosis" wasn't bad either. There wasn't anything to be good or bad. It read something like the opening of a novel, to perk your interest but not to give you anything, which it did quite well. It gave you nothing, but when your interest began to perk the story was over.

WAYNE W. MARTIN
Rte. 1, Box D-64
Macclenny, Florida

P.S. Why don't you solicit a story from Lester Boutillier, if nothing else it would be interesting to see his idea of a good story.

Al Sirois used the pseudonym of "Lewis S. Allyn" on "War Baby," but due to a confusion over the names his real name was given in two places, as you noted. He has decided not to bother with pseudonyms on future stories; my apologies to him for the mixup.—TW

Dear Ted:

I think you've finally put together an issue with some really interesting fiction in it. The May FANTASTIC was exceptional, even without any non-fiction features.

PG Wyal's "Nice and Easy" and the David R. Bunch story were the two best. Rotsler's story, on the other hand, was really dull. It is one thing to merely write about some future society as Rotsler did, but it is another to introduce along with this some of the components of a good story, such as conflict, which is what Wyal did. Because of the lack of such components Rotsler's story was on the whole unfulfilling. The other stories were all very good, which makes this issue far better than average.

By the way, I have yet to see a review of Ray Bradbury's great 1972 novel, *The Halloween Tree*. Upon my first reading I thought that Bradbury really overdid things a little style-wise. But after reading it the second time I began to think that it was really a nice book and I began to like the Bradbury-gone-wild style in which it was written. It's really a pleasant book. I'd like to know what Mr. Leiber thinks of it. How 'bout a review Fritz.

TOMMY TRADDLES
43 Franklin Street
Edwardsville, Pa. 18704

Dear Ted,

I first statrted reading FANTASTIC with the Aug. '71 issue and I must say that I am pleased with what has happened since then.

This idea might have been suggested before and proved unworkable, but in order to thwart black marketeering couldn't you just lump all the story endings on the last page of your magazine and require the distributors to return *that* page to you? Thus, they could sell the mags but would have to put up with enraged buyers demanding to know what happened to pages 129 and 130. You might even print the endings on the inside front cover of the mag instead.

Being a S&S fan, I am glad to see more of it appearing in FANTASTIC. However, I must admit that some of it has been disappointing.

The two Conan novellas were pretty bad, especially "The Witch of the Mists". It started out well enough, but ended in disaster. The antagonists were a bunch of clichés and the whole story seemed in a hurry to end itself.

The same was true of "Black Sphinx of Nebthu". It began okay, then went downhill. (That inside illustration was grotesque. I hope you guys weren't

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serious.)

Nevertheless, you have printed some good fantasy like "The Son of Black Morca" and the novel by de Camp. Your story in the Jan. '74 issue seemed more of a prelude to subsequent stories. That idea about a world above another world is an idea with many possibilities.

Regarding Roland's illustrations for "The Witch of the Mists", they reminded me very much of Frazetta's covers for the Conan series. Enough on that controversy.

A question though. Your comments on Torcon 2 as well as on previous conventions always come out five to six months after the event. I noticed that Asimov's column in F & SF was similarly dated. Must we wait that long to read about it? Couldn't you squeeze an editorial on the convention into one of your fall issues?

By the way, is that a drawing of you at the typewriter on your editorial headings?

JIM WILEY
USA Gen. Research Det.
APO NY 09757

Taking your questions in order: 1. The covers (or, in some cases, title-strips from the cover) are uniformly torn off all *supposedly returned (unsold) copies of books and magazines. I doubt we could either print all the story conclusions on the inside front cover or get dealers and distributors across the country to tear out an inside page. Too bad; I rather like the idea, myself. 2. Billy Graham specifically requested the opportunity to illustrate a Conan story for us, in order to show the folks over at Marvel comics what he could do with the character. It's hard to believe that they were any more impressed than I was. Graham is no longer doing illustrations for us. 3. This is being written in late April, for the September issue of* FANTASTIC; *it will appear on the newsstands in July. This is an irreducable lead time, and one about which I can do nothing. It takes time to get an issue in type, illustrate it and have it printed and shipped. As it is I'm always slipping behind my deadlines. 4. Yes, more or less the way I looked two years ago when it was drawn. Subsequently I've grown and shaved off several beards, mustaches, sideburns, etc., and shortened and lengthened my hair, most of these changes occuring according to the seasons.*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

In your editorial in the March issue you said that "it was news to me that the term 'science fiction' was an 'old term.' " When I read that I remembered an incident that happened earlier in the day: A friend happened to mention that the movie, "Charly," was going to be shown on our campus. Fine! So, I also mentioned that it was a science fiction story written in the 1950's (I used science fiction because I couldn't think of a better word at the time). He said, "So? What has that got to do with the story? . . . Besides, it wasn't a science fiction story, anyway!" He remarked "it wasn't *about Mars*" or going to other planets. That made me sick! People have such an addled idea of what science fiction encompasses. It's here that I agree with Ellison that "Science fiction" is an old term; old in the sense that people instinctively tack sf onto stories about Mars and going to other planets. When someone asks me what I'm reading and see a copy of FANTASTIC in my hands, they immediately reply, "Oh, that science fiction stuff!" with emphasis on the word "stuff!" Gernsback

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doomed science fiction with his "Ralph 124C 41 +" because with it came the sf that most people looked down upon (sf as exampled by stories with emphasis on scientific gadgetry, plastic heros, and thin plots that wouldn't hold water much less a person's attention). I wish I hadn't used "Science fiction" while talking to my friend, but what could I do? I guess I might've used speculative fiction, but some people aren't as well acquainted with this word as they are with the other. What we need is a new and better word that describes the "What if. . ." literature more adequately and won't group everything under the stereo-typed "science fiction." Perhaps I'm too much of an idealist—well, someone has to dream. Roger Theobald, a futurist author, says that society must change and move on in order to survive. So, too, has sf changed and survived, except the name. Maybe it's time it were changed, too.

RANDY MOHR
Whitworth College
Spokane, Wa. 99344

I disagree. There's nothing wrong with the term, "science fiction." What's wrong is the associations some people form for it. I think it's unlikely that a new name would dispell these associations—once those people discovered that the new term was synonymous with the old one. You might tell your friend that Charly *was based on the short story, "Flowers for Algernon," which first appeared in* The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction *and subsequently won a Hugo as the best sf short story of the year. That might give him a better appreciation for what "science fiction" means.*—TW

Dear Ted,

In the year I have been reading your magazines, there has been an occasional letter concerning *Star Trek* and the Roddenberry pilot movies. I have seen each episode several times along with reading the Blish adaptations. I'd just like to make a few comments.

Amanda, Spock's mother, is probably about fifty years old. Sarek, Spock's Vulcan father, is somewhere around one-hundred years old. I'm not absolutely certain of the human-female life-expectancy in that future time, but it's probably no more than a hundred years. (That's a wild guess.) The Vulcan life-expectancy is two-hundred years. Amanda will be senile and very possibly dead and Sarek will have 25% of his life left. (Relax, I know that Sarek has heart-trouble.) Please don't think I'm a rascist; I have nothing against Human-Vulcan love and sex. But let's think about this, Vulcans mate once every seven years. Will Amanda be satisfied? Would Sarek's non-emotional personality be sufficient for Amanda's human and supposedly emotional personality? Every marriage has some troubles I suppose. But what about their spring-off, Spock? Rh factors that are different cause trouble. Dr. McCoy says Spock has copper in his hemaglobin instead of iron. Can you imagine the complications? (Most likely nobody but me dares.) This doesn't conform to the Gernsback idea of learning science through science-fiction.

After all this criticism, I feel compelled to admit that I like the show. And almost everyone else I know likes it too. (My grandmother considers it out of the range of possibility.) People like it. Why was it taken off the air? One of my high-school

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teachers says that at the college dorms people would fight to see the few TV's. There are so goddamn many police shows, you'd think there's be room for *Star Trek* or some other science fiction show.

When I talk to some SF readers, they seem to regard *Star Trek* as inferior, second rate. (I guess you're one of them.) Roddenberry says something to the effect that for *Star Trek* to be popular with the general audience it must be simplified. Not that they're dumb, it's just that they don't know much about science fiction. (As you'll remember, a lot of people didn't understand *2001*.)

Incidentally, I don't just read *Star Trek*, I read all kinds of SF. (Satisfied!?) Enough bull-shitting about *Star Trek*. The first part I turn to in your magazines is/are the editorials. I was interested in what you said about Fed. Gov't Narcs. I like serials. I liked "The Stone That Never Came Down." It got me interested in Brunner. Some guy wrote that he wanted all short stories. I sure as hell don't. I like the highly intimate style in which you do your magazines. You are real. What's wrong with that guy who wants all Howard type stuff? He'd better wake up and see that there's more to SF than that. I like Conan stories but I don't read them exclusively.

Keep up the good work.

ERIC HACKENBERG
Erie, Pa.

The largest reason people did not understand 2001 *is that it was deliberately made confusing by the deletion of explanatory passages and details. Yet, it was extremely popular. I think Roddenberry's belief that sf must be "simplified" for a general audience on* TV *is a fundamental mistake—and one which doomed* Star Trek *to the level of comic-book-sf (which, whatever else it was or wasn't,* 2001 *was not). Although* Star Trek *has to this day a devoted following, apparently* NBC *was not convinced it was a* large *devoted following. Its recent revival as a Saturday morning animated show is probably the best indication of what the network thinks of it–and its audience.*—TW

Black Hawk (continued from page 36)

sword back in its scabbard, and drank deep of the red wine, watching dawn rise up over the edges of the world to fill the land with light; and he set his face towards the south, that last of the Black Hawk warriors.

And he passed from sight, down the hill-slope, striding with long steps towards the place where the great range of purple mountains marched across the world from west to east.

His heart lifted within him, for the night was over. And as he strode from view, he lifted his voice and sang again that warriors' song . . . .

Out there, beyond the setting Sun,
Are kingdoms waiting to be won!
And crowns, and women, gold and wine–
Courage! And hold the battleline!

—LIN CARTER

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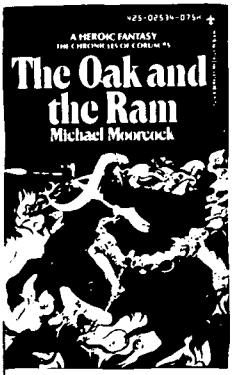

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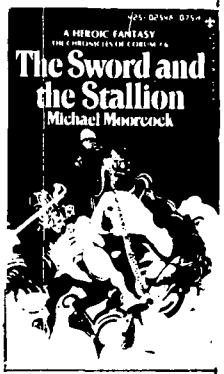

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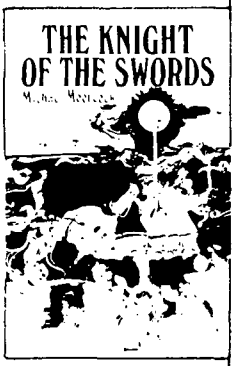

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